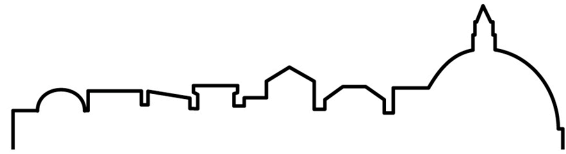

THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Elias and Mariana Souri

Interview Date: November 23, 2002 and December 18, 2002
Interviewer: Hilary Russell
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[Note: corrections and clarifications were added in brackets by interviewer Hilary Russell during review of this transcript. She also prepared a Souri family genealogy to identify many of the people discussed during the interview.]

TAPE 1/SIDE 1

RUSSELL: You want to spell your names out?

E. SOURI: Sure, my first name is Elias [spells] and that's S-O-U-R-I.

M. SOURI: And my name is Mariana [spells] and the last name is Souri [spells].

RUSSELL: And we're at their home at 1125 East Capitol Street SE, on Lincoln Park.

E. SOURI: Washington, DC 20003 [Laughs].

RUSSELL: It's the 23rd of November 2002, and it's about 2 in the afternoon on a Saturday. This sets up the whole ambience. I'm a neighbor. I've lived next door for three years, almost four, so this is an easygoing, comfortable, and friendly interview. One of the reasons I really wanted to interview you was not only for this reason, but because of the long family history in this house that your grandparents…

M. SOURI: bought in 1927.

RUSSELL: So tell me something about your grandparents [Elias and Karimeh Souri].

E. SOURI: Well, my father's parents lived in Georgetown on 36th…

M. SOURI: 36th and Prospect. 1234 36th Street.

E. SOURI: Right near Georgetown. Georgetown was right behind them. And my grandfather there had a barbershop.

RUSSELL: And had he come from Lebanon?

E. SOURI: Yes.

M. SOURI: Actually at that time known as Syria.

RUSSELL: Syria. When did he come?

M. SOURI: That's a good question. [Laughs]. I believe he was over here a couple of times before he came to stay, and from what we can gather he came in through Canada, the upper United States. He worked at lumberjack camps and he was at the Louisiana Exposition. That was in 1902? [1904]

E. SOURI: I don't know.

M. SOURI: I'm not sure. Anyway if you see the movie "Meet Me in St. Louis" it will give you the year. I don't know what the year was. And why he came to Washington, I don't really know. But he settled here I guess basically because cousins were here.

RUSSELL: He settled here because cousins were here. So was it a large extended family?

M. SOURI: Oh very. Most of them actually, the relatives, belonged to my grandmother, his wife [Karimeh Souri, nee Buttash]. They married in 1907.

Paternal grandparents, Elias Souri (photo date 1907) and Karimeh Buttash Souri (undated)

RUSSELL: Did they marry here?

M. SOURI: They married here, at the St. Nicholas Cathedral in New York City.

RUSSELL: So they met in Washington?

M. SOURI: Ah, yeah. I'm assuming it was a match, which is the way most of them worked at that point. They still do that today. They try. [Laughs].

RUSSELL: So your grandparents continued living in Georgetown after they were married?

E. SOURI: They did. And our dad [Nicholas Elias Souri] was born in Georgetown, 1909 or 8?

M. SOURI: 1908.

E. SOURI: 1908, and at one point and… I think we've been able to figure when the C & O [Chesapeake & Ohio] Canal closed.

M. SOURI: When the C & O Canal closed, and all the "barge people," is what they called them, moved into Georgetown, they were considered undesirable so the good people of Georgetown moved out. [Laughs].

E. SOURI: Because at that time Georgetown was considered a slum. And that's when our grandfather— our father's father—found this place here. He opened up a dry goods store on Pennsylvania Avenue—pots, pans, corsets, household goods, that sort of thing—but we don't know where the store was. We're just assuming that the store was in walking distance of the house.

RUSSELL: So it would be on Pennsylvania Avenue SE.

M. SOURI: Yes. Probably close to 11th Street. [14th Street] We're not quite sure. No one can really tell us. We have a picture of the store. [seems to have been where the KFC parking lot is now on Pennsylvania near 14th SE]

E. SOURI: With him standing in the store with all the stuff hanging.

RUSSELL: Oh, I'd love to see that.

E. SOURI: We should have it upstairs somewhere.

M. SOURI: It's up there in that pile that we haven't hung yet.

RUSSELL: The Project [Capitol Hill History Project] might like to have a copy, if there is such a possibility.

E. SOURI: Oh, yes, we can get you a copy.

Paternal grandfather Elias Souri in his Pennsylvania Avenue dry goods store, circa 1930s. Some details: on the left, women's blouses for 35 and 50 cents.

RUSSELL: Do you know the name of the store?

E. SOURI: Nothing, nothing. All we know is there's a picture of him standing in the store, with the gaslights, hanging from the ceiling.

M. SOURI: Actually I still have stuff from his store.

RUSSELL: You do? [Laughs].

M. SOURI: Yeah, I do. It's up on the third floor in boxes. I didn't know what to do with it, so I stuck them up on the third floor.

RUSSELL: Those date from when, the things you have?

M. SOURI: 1920s.

RUSSELL: Wow!

M. SOURI: They're good. I found trimming lace on bolts. I've got—and I can't remember where I put them—there are a whole bunch of creamers, the things you put the milk in for coffee. I found cigarette cases: the silver, you know, fancy cigarette cases that people used to use, cufflinks.

E. SOURI: We have two jars, two large jars, of Planter's [brand name] peanuts for five cents a package. I don't know how big the packages are.

M. SOURI: They're up on the third floor.

E. SOURI: They're upstairs on the third floor.

RUSSELL: Peanuts still in them?

E. SOURI: No, they're empty now, but they're about two gallon-size glass jars with glass tops, really very elegant.

RUSSELL: For five cents?

E. SOURI: Five cents for Planter's peanuts. There's Mr. Peanut with his cane and his glasses, embossed in the glass jar. They're upstairs on the third floor.

M. SOURI: Then down, I'd say we have a very brand new round waffle iron, never used, from his store down in the basement.

RUSSELL: Well, the Museum of the City of Washington would be interested [Laughs] in some of these things.

E. SOURI: We have some old irons downstairs as well, the kind that you would have to heat first in order to use.

M. SOURI: That spittoon up there is from the store.

RUSSELL: So tell me, he moved here and opened the store. That's what you said?

E. SOURI: Yes.

RUSSELL: So before that he didn't have a…

M. SOURI: He just had the barbershop. So he changed the business.

E. SOURI: Yes.

RUSSELL: And how long did the store stay in operation?

E. SOURI: That's a good question.

M. SOURI: I really don't know.

E. SOURI: Probably from the late twenties, I'd say 1927, when this house was bought, which was bought for $13,000. And he retired sometime in the thirties, but I don't know when that was.

M. SOURI: It would be late, would have been late thirties.

RUSSELL: Late thirties?

E. SOURI: And he died in 1944, but I don't know when he retired.

RUSSELL: He sold the store when he retired?

E. SOURI: I don't know.

M. SOURI: I'm pretty sure he did.

RUSSELL: And not to a family member?

E. SOURI: No, we have no trace of it.

RUSSELL: Did family members help in the store?

M. SOURI: I believe my grandmother did. She would work in there. And I think Dad did, because he used to tell me… He told me a story one time that I think a young lady came in to buy female apparel and she wouldn't talk to him. She waited until my grandmother came out and she would talk to my grandmother, but she wouldn't ask my father. She needed a bra is what she needed [Laughs] and she wouldn't go to my father.

RUSSELL: You don't have any books or account books or documents?

M. SOURI: No, I haven't found anything like that.

E. SOURI: I'm thinking. There may be something down in the basement in a metal box that I found. Account books or accounting with some entries, but I don't know if they're from the store, so I can't really tell you that. I'd have to look at them, dig them out and look at them, and show them to you. But I don't know that you can identify them as actually coming from his store.

M. SOURI: I found the original contract for our oil furnace that's down there now and the tanks that were put in for the oil from Standard Oil. It's now Griffith Consumer's or whatever they're called. What else have we found?

RUSSELL: What date was the furnace, about?

M. SOURI: Off the hand I can't recall, but I have the paper. What else did we find?

E. SOURI: The house was built in 1892, we know that much. [It was built in 1907]

RUSSELL: How many people were living here at that time?

E. SOURI: There would have been our two grandparents,

M. SOURI: Tita and Jiddo [Arabic for grandmother and grandfather, Elias and Karimeh Souri]

E. SOURI: and then my grandmother's brother and our uncle [Nestoss Buttash] and then, once my dad got married, then our mom [Mary, nee Salloom], then, of course, the two of us. At one point there, in the early forties until our grandfather died, there were six people in the house, and one bathroom. [LAUGHS]. Can you imagine?

M. SOURI: I guess it never bothered anybody.

E. SOURI: No, I think we just all had to coordinate very well.

RUSSELL: So, I'm jumping ahead a little bit. I'm going to go back, but so you grew up in this house? Both of you?

E. SOURI: Yes.

RUSSELL: And really you've never left it.

M. SOURI: I haven't, no.

E. SOURI: She hasn't. I have.

RUSSELL: Yes. You were in Chicago, recently anyway. Maybe other places. So you've never… That's great. I knew it had been your grandfather's house, but I didn't realize you'd lived here the whole time.

M. SOURI: When my brother got engaged —I forgot when you got engaged…

E. SOURI: 1971, but that's recent history.

M. SOURI: And that was after that, I bought the house from my parents for $10. There had to be a money transaction so that's what they said to do: buy it for $10, so I did. I'm not sure you could do it like that today, but you could in the seventies. [Laughs].

E. SOURI: It was a generous offer.

RUSSELL: That was a deal. So going back to your grandparents, these are from things you not necessarily remember experiencing, but stories that you were told. What are some of the more outstanding memories you have of their residence here that were conveyed by stories or anecdote?

E. SOURI: Well, one of the biggest stories was that our grandfather, our father's father, was friends with my mother's father, who was a priest [Job Salloom]. He was ordained in 1912 and became the priest to the Syrian community in Washington, D.C. And the first church was over by the central library. I know the first church was a rented room, but I don't know where it was.

Maternal grandparents, Rev. Job Salloom (shortly before his death in 1936) and Debe Salloom (undated)

M. SOURI: Off Louisiana [Indiana] Avenue in Northwest. The building is still there, but an actual house was purchased at, where was that, S… it's in the Mount Vernon Square area, where the new Convention Center's coming up, so obviously the streets are not there anymore. A house was purchased; our grandfather Souri mortgaged this house to renovate the building that they purchased for a church to make it look like a church.

E. SOURI: And that was Eighth and K or Eighth and L?

M. SOURI: No, it was Eighth Street NW, over in the Mount Vernon Square area. I don't remember the church that much, to be honest with you. We did not know my mother's father, and I don't really remember my father's father. They both died.

E. SOURI: My mother's father died in 1936.

M. SOURI: Before we were born.

E. SOURI: And then our father's father died in 1944, like I said. So we really didn't know our mother's father, the priest.

M. SOURI: But we knew our grandmothers very well [Karemeh Souri, nee Buttash, and Debe Salloom].

E. SOURI: They both survived way long after their husbands died.

M. SOURI: They were a lot younger.

E. SOURI: But, in any event, both men knew each other; they were good friends, and they collaborated on the support of the Church. They were big churchgoers and wanted to keep the Syrian community together, and there was a small community here, and there still is. Most of them have moved out into the suburbs now, but at one time they were in Washington, D.C. Then almost everybody was related, one way or another. Cousins, whatever.

M. SOURI: And they still are.

E. SOURI: Oh, yes. So we have an extended family, cousins and second cousins, all over, even out into Delaware.

M. SOURI: Most people don't know their third, fourth, and fifth cousins. We do. [LAUGHS].

RUSSELL: Was there a Syrian community in Capitol Hill?

M. SOURI: Over on the Maryland Avenue Northeast side, there was quite a large community over there. There were a few over here on 11th Street [Southeast], but the largest part was over on Maryland Avenue, at13th and 14th Maryland Avenue Northeast.

E. SOURI: There were also some on a street called Florence Avenue, but now the name has been changed to 14th Place.

M. SOURI: We went over there the other day, we were curious about it. I remember going over to this little street, and it was dark, and I didn't like going over there because of all the old people. [Laughs] But we just drove over there a few Sundays ago just to see what it was like, and it's no longer called Florence Street. But they were very small houses.

E. SOURI: Almost reminds you of Philadelphia, the street is so small.

M. SOURI: Almost like alley houses. It's really cute. My grandmother, my mother's mother [Debe Saloom], lived at 1330 Maryland Avenue, and we'd walk back and forth. It's not that far, about seven blocks. But they came over in about 1902, I think. They came over by boat.

E. SOURI: Our mother's parents [Job and Debe Salloom]..

M. SOURI: They had one daughter who was born over there, came with them. She [Debe Salloom] was pregnant with my mother when she came here. And they ended up in Philadelphia. My mother was born in Philadelphia.

E. SOURI: By midwife. She never had a birth certificate. She had a very difficult time trying to prove her age when she needed to get her Social Security.

M. SOURI: Let's see. We lived with my father's mother [Karimeh Souri].

E. SOURI: And our dad really didn't have a lot of money. He worked at odd jobs, so he lived with his parents, and then when he got married he moved in with his new wife [Mary, nee Salloom]. They were married in 1936, the same year that my mom's father died. In fact, my mom's father married my parents, then I think he died, our grandfather [Job Salloom], five weeks after the wedding. So that was a disastrous occasion. It really affected our mother a lot when her father died. She was very close to him. He was priest at this particular church for 24 years. It was a difficult time for him. He had a very demanding congregation. And everybody involved themselves in everybody else's lives, so he was forever a peacemaker with disputes among families.

M. SOURI: Since he could read and write, he did all of the correspondence and everything for everybody. He settled disputes between the government and personal and whatever. If anybody needed… someone came over from,

at the time, Syria, then he'd try to find them a place to live, make sure they got a job, all kinds of things, and since the community itself didn't have a lot of money, he would go as far as Pittsburgh to try to get money for the church. And he was also, I guess, an itinerant priest. If somebody needed a wedding or a baptism or a funeral, wherever it was, he would go. So he would travel to New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and I think at one time they said he went to North Carolina, but I can't prove that.

E. SOURI: I remember hearing that too, that he went to North Carolina.

M. SOURI: And of course my grandmother, his wife [Debe Salloom], couldn't go with him because she was extremely carsick. We got a story that she literally walked to Philadelphia when they went one time. She couldn't ride in the car without being extremely car sick, so she got out of the car and walked along the side of the car. And the car just drove slowly.

E. SOURI: I guess I should mention for people who don't know, the Orthodox Christian priests married. They were not celibate. He had a large family. He had, I don't know how many daughters—four? And one son [Edward, and five daughters, including Mary: Nezera, Scandria, Helen, and Futine].

M. SOURI: Six kids.

E. SOURI: Those were the ones that survived. There was a set of twins that died, and I think one other child that died.

M. SOURI: Those were all in the old country.

E. SOURI: But I guess in those days those were accepted facts of life. Not all the children survived.

RUSSELL: And on the other side, how many children?

M. SOURI: Dad was an only child.

RUSSELL: Only child?

M. SOURI: Yeah. My grandmother had some kind of a uterine infection when he was born, and she couldn't have any other children. So dad was an only child. The reason he stayed here at the house and after he married mom was because his father asked him to look after his mother and not to leave her alone. Dad was a very good son, believe me.

E. SOURI: So, our parents lived in this house from the time that they were married in 1936, and they stayed in this house until they died.

Souri family in 1941. Mariana and Elias with parents Mary and Nicholas

RUSSELL: I know you have a grapeless grapevine from Syria in the back yard.

M. SOURI: I know that it has traveled. I know it came from Georgetown, and I am sure they brought it with them.

RUSSELL: It came to Georgetown and then it was transplanted here.

M. SOURI: It has brothers and sisters all over the District. [LAUGHS]. Pieces have been given to many families. My great uncle even had one at the old church at Mount Vernon Square. He planted one over there for any one who wanted grape leaves.

E. SOURI: Of course, grape leaves are a big staple—they can be stuffed or rolled with rice and meat and cooked, and it is a very good diet, very healthy.

RUSSELL: I can attest to that.

E. SOURI: So that grapevine is still producing after all this time.

M. SOURI: It was planted in 1927, as far as we know, and it has been surviving. It almost didn't survive when we had a new garage built. I kept telling those people if they killed it they were in trouble. [Laughs]

RUSSELL: So the Lebanese community was very close knit?

M. SOURI: Oh very.

E. SOURI: Yes they were.

M. SOURI: I would say most of the ones, especially on the Maryland… who lived around Maryland Avenue area were all first cousins with my grandmother Souri. They all came from the same village, and they almost all came at the same time. It was just… I don't know why they did it other than—well, persecution was the reason they came.

They were being persecuted by the Ottoman Turks. Anybody that was a Christian was in trouble, and most of them, they were basically Turkish of Lebanese descent. We have papers from the Sultan of Turkey from my grandmother when she came over here. Or actually when she went back from Lebanon. They had to… They were—almost all of them were born in Mersine, Turkey, in the Anatolia.

E. SOURI: M E R S I N E. It is a port city. When I was stationed in Turkey in the sixties, I went by there, but there was nothing that I could recognize.

RUSSELL: No cousins.

E. SOURI: Well, there was no one I could find, so honestly I didn't really try that hard. There was nowhere I knew where to start, and I doubt there would be many records available anyway. It was just a big port city and that was all.

M. SOURI: Unfortunately, there are no records overseas because they were all burned, but I don't think there was anybody left over there; I think they all came here. All of them came… They were first cousins and all of the family are still around.

RUSSELL: Not to generalize more than we need to… but what kind of jobs did they have—the group that you knew, your cousins.

M. SOURI: They did restaurant work. Grocery stores, they peddled…

E. SOURI: Small merchants, just like they would have been had they stayed over there. Wouldn't have been any different. They just brought the mindset over here to the United States.

RUSSELL: And who were their customers?

M. SOURI: A lot of them were neighborhood people. How do I put it?

E. SOURI: Just within the community.

RUSSELL: The white people.

M. SOURI: Exactly. That is the way that it is. They worked, as a matter of fact; there was a cousin of my grandmother over on Maryland Avenue—Salloom—Mr. Brown.

E. SOURI: Yes, Mr. Brown.

M. SOURI: His name actually was Ishaq.

E. SOURI: Isaac, Isaac.

M. SOURI: When he came in through Ellis Island… I guess it more than anybody… he couldn't spell it. They didn't know what he was saying, so they called him George Brown, and he was stuck with that name. We didn't call him that…

E. SOURI: He had a vegetable wagon and a horse, and he would pull the wagon up over here on the corner where the dry cleaners is now.

M. SOURI: But he didn't have the horse for us… [in our time]

E. SOURI: On 11th and East Capitol.

M. SOURI: But he didn't have the horse with us.

E. SOURI: I remember hearing about the horse.

M. SOURI: Mom used to tell us about the horse but he…

E. SOURI: I vaguely remember a horse. I don't think I am imagining that, because I used to be fascinated by the animal because it was probably the first time I ever saw a horse.

M. SOURI: Part of our problem is we have been told some of the stories so many times we don't know what we know and what we actually experienced. That's part of our problem.

E. SOURI: I remember, though, his wagon just being so loaded with greens and vegetables and, of course. Mr. Brown would… he would have his customers. He would pull out over here and I guess people would wait for him, and he would sell to them. He was an illiterate. The story I remember was that he really did not know how to read or write, but he could do his arithmetic in his head and he could keep everybody's tally in his head.

M. SOURI: And he did.

E. SOURI: He could add up whatever it was that they purchased in his head and give them a correct sum so that nobody felt they were getting cheated. But none of this stuff was ever written down. He just did the whole thing in his head.

M. SOURI: He kept tabs of everybody's grocery bill, but they paid him when they could. And he knew to the penny. He was a big man, at least he was to us. Maybe he wasn't as big as I thought…

E. SOURI: No, I don't think he was all that tall. He was big, but he was rotund. But I don't think he was a very tall individual.

M. SOURI: But he would around with his truck and, you know, deliver the groceries to the people. That was his business.

RUSSELL: So he bought the vegetables.

E. SOURI: We don't know where he got them. He must have gotten them wholesale some place, then he peddled them around the neighborhood with his horse and wagon. And then there was the story about this: the horse used to be an old fire horse and at one time the horse heard a fire bell—a siren, I don't know what—and took off with the wagon, but that's all we know. I mean it's one of those funny things you can imagine how that whole thing could

have gone, but I imagine he got the horse back. But eventually he got a truck. I remember the truck too, but the truck really didn't have the fascination that the horse did. You know, a truck is a truck, [LAUGHS] but a horse is interesting.

RUSSELL: And you are a vet, a veterinarian.

E. SOURI: But I don't think that had anything to do with it at the time. I was just a little kid and this big animal was very fascinating.

M. SOURI: And this man was fascinating. He was just extremely fascinating.

RUSSELL: So in the racial hierarchy of Washington, how did people from Syria fit in, as far as you knew?

E. SOURI: Well, they weren't of European descent, so some of them were looked down on, and we used to hear stories about that, but it didn't matter that much at the time. But we had heard about that, but I don't know that it had a lasting effect.

M. SOURI: Not on us, but I know that Dad said that when they moved here to this house the next door neighbors moved out.

E. SOURI: We don't know that had anything to do with…

M. SOURI: Well, they said it because they were foreign-born, foreign-speaking people.

E. SOURI: There goes the neighborhood.

M. SOURI: And I know that they were… there was one beach that we couldn't go in, I can't remember whether it was Breezy Point or whatever… Drum Point or whatever.. beach that we weren't allowed to go in.

RUSSELL: Your parents didn't allow you, or you just heard that…

M. SOURI: Oh no, we were of an ethnic background and we weren't allowed in. None of that, you know, it didn't bother us, basically, because we were in such an enclave of our own people that it didn't make any difference. And we had more than enough of cousins and other cousins that it didn't make any difference.

RUSSELL: Sure. This is sort of for the record, and, you know, in terms of how Washington used to be.

M. SOURI: Sure. My mother once told the story that children in the neighborhood on Maryland Avenue would tease her father because they thought he was a Jew. I guess because he looked like one. And he would always… whenever he would pass by a group of kids they would tease him because they thought he was a Jew. This is how my mother put it. Until one day he pulled a cross out from underneath his jacket and showed it to them. And then, I think, thereafter he was left alone. But sure there was prejudice, but we weren't exposed to it that much—not as kids.

M. SOURI: As I said, I think we were extremely sheltered with the family.

RUSSELL: I want to probably come back to your grandparents again, but what schools did you go to?

M. SOURI: Hine, Bryan, and.. Bryan, Hine, and Eastern. Bryan School, over here on Independence Avenue, that is becoming condos or townhouses.

E. SOURI: At that time it was called B Street, not Independence Avenue.

M. SOURI: And Hine, over here by Eastern Market.

E. SOURI: At that time, it was not the Hine that is here now. It was a much, much older building with creaky wood floors. Actually, when I think back that building had a lot of class. It's just a shame it couldn't have been renovated rather than torn down. When I think back it was a substantial building—big high ceilings, big doors with transoms, and, of course, the old blackboards, but I remember specifically the creaky halls because I guess the floors were falling apart. But, when I think about it, it was a much nicer building than the one that's there now.

M. SOURI: And Eastern High School, down here at 17th and East Capitol Street.

RUSSELL: And they were all white schools?

E. SOURI: Yes, at that time.

M. SOURI: Eastern wasn't.

RUSSELL: Eastern wasn't?

E. SOURI: Well no, not when we were there. 1954…

M. SOURI: No, later than that.

E. SOURI: Well, we were at Hine when integration started. That was 1954. And I remember the white kids walking out of school and a lot of them stayed out of school for days. It was what they called the strike.

M. SOURI: We didn't.

E. SOURI: Well no, we didn't, but it was difficult for us going to school because the kids would be outside jeering and calling us names.

RUSSELL: Which kids were those?

E. SOURI: The white kids, who were basically on strike, who didn't want to go into the school because the blacks were in there now. And…

[phone rings]

E. SOURI: That went on for a few days, but finally everything did settle down. But there was a lot of resentment for a long time among the white children about the blacks coming in.

RUSSELL: So what year was that?

E. SOURI: 1954.

RUSSELL: 1954. So what grade were you in then?

E. SOURI: I'm not even sure. I guess I was in the seventh grade. It might have been the earliest grade. We were in Bryan up until the sixth grade, and seventh grade we went to Hine. It was probably the seventh grade. Of course, Eisenhower was in office at the time, and, of course, it was during his administration that integration took place.

RUSSELL: Were you both there at the same time?

M. SOURI: Yep, Uh huh.

RUSSELL: So what grade where you in then?

M. SOURI: It was probably eighth.

E. SOURI: You were a grade ahead of me.

RUSSELL: What else do you remember from that period—the integration period then? What the classroom was like after. Anything like that.

E. SOURI: The white people started to move out.

M. SOURI: Yeah.

E. SOURI: That was the biggest thing that happened. This whole neighborhood changed. And there were complaints that the realtors were doing what is known as blockbusting. As soon as a black family would move in, then the white people started to think about moving out. And, of course, the realtors were blamed for doing that: for encouraging the white people to move out and change the neighborhood. But as soon as blacks started moving in then the neighborhood began to change, and so Kentucky Avenue, 12th, 11th, here on East Capitol, everything started to change because black people were moving in. And of course, the schools changed as well, and Hine within less than two years became a very black school. By the time we got to Eastern there were still white children there, but they diminished more and more and more. By the time I graduated from Eastern—I was then 16—there was a small cluster of white children in an entirely black school. But the neighborhood changed, and they started to go down. There's just no question about it the neighborhoods were not well kept. The yards, the houses, everything was just badly kept. Lincoln Park was not a very safe place to go into at nighttime, especially on Saturday nights, and the neighborhood didn't start to come back until whenever. The 70s?

M. SOURI: In the 70s, this area didn't go. This particular block didn't go as much as some of the other areas did. A lot of the old families just stayed. They were elderly, and they didn't really have any place to go.

E. SOURI: And I remember relatives urging my father to move out. Go to Montgomery County, Prince George's County, because it was so much better there. But I am glad that he didn't. One of the reasons why he couldn't was

he couldn't afford it. I mean, this house was paid for. So it was a place to live, and he just simply didn't have the money to move and go buy a house out in the pristine suburbs, in those days.

M. SOURI: So it didn't really belong to him yet either; it was still Tita's [grandmother's].

E. SOURI: Well, yeah, that's true until she died. Tita was our grandmother—a Syrian term for grandmother. But, well, he couldn't have afforded it even if he wanted to. Just didn't have the money. To be very honest, I am glad he didn't.

M. SOURI: Me too.

E. SOURI: Now, the way things have turned out. No one had a clue in those days. But I would say from the late 50s until the early 70s or mid 70s, this area was really pretty much run down. And you could see it. We had blacks for neighbors. Next door, where you live now [1123], was a brother and sister. Their last name was Sacks. I don't remember what their first names were. But Mr. Sacks, I believe had been married and he had children.

M. SOURI: Yeah, he…

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

RUSSELL: How do you spell that?

E. SOURI: I think it was S A C K S.

M. SOURI: They were not the black family that moved in. They'd been here… I don't know how long they were here—

E. SOURI: Well, ever since we were kids.

M. SOURI: I just remember them being here. And the funny thing is she couldn't say… They used to call each other by their last names, and they would all call my grandmother Missouri.

RUSSELL: Missouri.

M. SOURI: She couldn't quite say Miss or Mrs. Souri. It came out Missouri, which would tickle me to no end.

E. SOURI: The best thing I can remember about the Sacks was they had a good sense of humor. They would kid with us kids across the porch. They would be on their front porch, and we would be on our front porch, and they just had a good sense of humor, very affable people. Then of course they died, I don't know who died first, but ultimately both were gone, and Mr. Sacks's son, I remember, I guess he inherited the property, and so he sold and a black family moved in, and I don't know how they took care of the house, but I had a feeling they didn't take care of the house as well as they could. And the house went into a great deal of disrepair. And it stayed that way until they moved out, and I don't know when all that happened.

E. SOURI: Again, in the 70s.

RUSSELL: The Sacks were African American?

M. SOURI: No, they were white.

E. SOURI: They were Jewish.

M. SOURI: They were Jewish.

RUSSELL: And you said Mrs. Sacks sat on the porch and talked with…

E. SOURI: Miss Sacks. She was unmarried.

M. SOURI: She was not married. Unmarried. She would sit in her rocking chair close to the door, and my grandmother, Tita Souri, would sit over in a chair out there, and they would talk to each other. And I don't know if anybody understood, but they got along, they were fine.

RUSSELL: Your grandmother didn't speak much…

M. SOURI: You know, the funny part is for both of my grandmothers, I thought they spoke perfect English.

E. SOURI: But they didn't.

M. SOURI: They didn't, I found out later I was just translating it in my head. My grandmother Tita Salloom, my mother's mother, really didn't speak any English at all other than "Hello honey, budi a cuppa coffa?" Do you want a cup of coffee?" That's about the only thing I remember her saying in English.

E. SOURI: But she didn't have to learn English. Because her entire life was spent within her group; within church, and within her family. So she almost never learned English. Our grandmother Souri…

M. SOURI: She was more worldly…

E. SOURI: Right. She got out more so she could speak English.

M. SOURI: Tita Souri would dress up; she had her routines, and when she dressed up, everything had to be just so. She spoke some English, and I can't imagine it was very much.

RUSSELL: What language did you speak at home?

M. SOURI: Both, Arabic and English.

E. SOURI: Well, English primarily. Our parents spoke English, so we did too.

M. SOURI: But we understood everything. Tita Souri was the matriarch. Everything had to be done in her fashion as she was from the old county. Monday was laundry day. We still have the boiling tub down there in the basement. The clothes had to be boiled, and we had two galvanized tubs—one with blue water and one with clear water. That

was every Monday. I did not stay out of school on Monday. I did not stay out of school on Thursday or Friday. [Laughs] We had a very good attendance record at school. We did laundry all day on Monday. When Mom finally got a washing machine, my grandmother didn't trust it—it wouldn't get your clothes clean. She still boiled the clothes. She still put them in the blue water, the clear, but she used the wringer on the washing machine to get the water out. It was an ordeal. We actually had this tub which sat on, I guess, a gas burner…

E. SOURI: Yes it was a gas burner.

M. SOURI: To boil water to put your sheets in. We still have the stick that she used to…

E. SOURI: We still have that stick downstairs in the basement. She used to stir the laundry.

M. SOURI: Thursday was cleaning day on the first floor and, I mean, clean. Oh glory, I think everything was removed. It had to be cleaned. Friday was the second-floor cleaning. Spring cleaning was basically everything on the third floor would get moved down to the basement, and the fall everything in the basement would get moved to the third floor. It was just an ordeal. Everything was… We had clothes lines outside. There were pulleys. They went from the garage to the porch. All clothes were hung out there.

E. SOURI: I just want to go back a little bit when we were younger kids. We used to play on the steps of the Lincoln Apartment over on 12th Street, and there was a janitor who lived in the basement…

M. SOURI: Mr. Cunningham.

E. SOURI: Mr. Cunningham, you know, I was trying to think of his name, and he was always bad-tempered, and he wouldn't like us to play on the steps of the Lincoln Apartment. He would come up out of the basement steps and chase us off. So we might have a few minutes to be able to play on the steps before he showed up, but he was sort of a formidable kind of character, and he would come out and yell at us and we would run off, and it was sort of like a game. Occasionally, we would come back and play on the steps of the Lincoln Apartment again, and he would chase us off again. It was stuff like that I remember as a kid—those things just stick with you. There used to be an apartment house, there was a residence converted into apartments on Independence and 11th on the north, I can't think, northwest corner. It's no longer there now. We used to try to sneak into that place. It was a very dark and foreboding building. Spooky. Kids, you know, kids would just love to get in there and scare themselves. Very disreputable place. Ultimately it was torn down and replaced by the building that is there now. But I remember how dark and foreboding that house used to be. We would go inside—I don't think our parents ever knew this—and try to look into the rooms and see who was there. I am sure we got chased out. But it was seedy. I don't even know who lived there anymore.

RUSSELL: Were there a lot of children in the neighborhood?

E. and M. SOURI: Yes, there were.

RUSSELL: And you…

E. SOURI: We all played and fought with each other. Oh yeah. And they went to Bryan… [school]

M. SOURI: Yeah, went to Bryan…

E. SOURI: …but, again, after integration came along then a lot of that just passed. All those families just plain moved out. They were gone.

RUSSELL: When black families were moving in, where were they coming from?

E. SOURI: Oh, I don't know where they came from.

M. SOURI: I have no idea.

RUSSELL: So before integration, if you looked around on the street nearly everybody you saw was white?

M. SOURI: Oh yeah. I think a lot of black people came in from Southwest when they were tearing it down and renovating it. A fair number came up this way because it was an area they knew. They moved here and PG County [Prince George's].

E. SOURI: But we didn't see too much hostility—at least I didn't—until we got to Eastern, and there was some. Where, since they were so few white kids left, there were encounters between the blacks and the white kids. I remember some gangs beating up on one of the white kids, for whatever reason; now I don't know what it was. But there was nothing you could really do about it. I mean everything had changed, and we weren't about to move to go anywhere. I don't think I really had that many problems. There were certainly black kids at Eastern who were very good, that I was friends with. I supposed it was a mix. There was some hostility, and there was not. But we weren't really a part of that. I mean everybody we associated with, white or black, all got along.

RUSSELL: Did you go to school dances and football games and events…?

M. SOURI: Not really. I guess it just wasn't a part of our culture.

E. SOURI: Some football games I remember going to at Eastern, but dances, no.

M. SOURI: Dances, I know I didn't go to any. I remember going to a couple of football games, especially on Thanksgiving Day. But that had to be on the morning only, because we had Thanksgiving dinner here at this house, the main meal, and we would go over to Maryland Avenue and have dessert and whatever. Because there would be big gatherings.

RUSSELL: What else did you do for fun? I mean what, where did you go in terms of…

E. SOURI: When we were very young, the first I remember in 1947, we started going to Rehobeth Beach, Delaware. That's before the bridge went up, and there were still ferries, and we would take the ferry across the Chesapeake Bay to get to the other side. Of course, that was very adventuresome for us because we had never been anywhere. Just the idea of going into another state was like going into another country. So, I remember, we have photographs being at Rehobeth Beach at that time and, of course, Rehobeth was a small town with sandy streets and

it was family-oriented. Those were the fun things. We would go for two weeks, and it was a big deal packing up and all that sort of thing, and in the fall we would go up to Skyline Drive, have our big picnic up there at an area called Elk Wallow. And every autumn, in October…

M. SOURI: Every October…

E. SOURI: Like clockwork, the families would get together; not only just us, the Souris, but other relatives that we knew, would sort of like convoy and go up to Elk Wallow and build our fire and…

M. SOURI: My mother's brother and sisters…

E. SOURI: Have chicken and potato salad and..

M. SOURI: And spaghetti. Those were the American things. Then we also have Arabic food that you have to have. But that was every October. We would go to Glen Echo and go swimming and picnicking…we did a lot of picnicking. We would go to Great Falls.

E. SOURI: And I remember riding to Glen Echo on the streetcar with our uncle.

M. SOURI: I do too.

E. SOURI: We had an uncle who lived here.

M. SOURI: [Laughs] Great uncle.

E. SOURI: and he would take us to Glen Echo on the streetcar, and I remember going over the trestles and how that was, because you could just look right down.

M. SOURI: He was warned by my grandmother, his sister, not to take us anywhere.

E. SOURI: Of course he did.

M. SOURI: Not to do it. We would no sooner leave the front door we would get on a streetcar. He would take us. We practically visited every statue in town. He would… I don't know whether he was fascinated with them or he wanted us to see them.

E. SOURI: That brings up another point. That would have had to have been in the 40s after the war, and you ought to know that there used to be streetcars out here riding right alongside the park. And the streetcar would come down East Capitol Street, go all the way down East Capitol, I guess to the Car Barn.

M. SOURI: Car Barn and turn around.

E. SOURI: And then turn around. So there was tracks on the other side of Lincoln Park and traffic was two-way; it wasn't one-way, and I remember that very clearly.

M. SOURI: On each side of the park.

E. SOURI: On each side of the park. So that… and when I look at the street now I don't know how that was possible, but there was two-way traffic. I don't know how that worked out, it must have been a mess, plus the streetcars. And the streetcars were fun. Of course they were overhead trolleys.

M. SOURI: No, we never had overhead trolleys here. These were on the ground.

E. SOURI: But I remember seeing overhead trolleys, somewhere, must have been Georgetown.

M. SOURI: In Georgetown, no, wait a minute, no—I don't know—yeah, you're right, I remember seeing them, but I don't know where.

E. SOURI: Because the sparks used to fly when the cars went around turns.

M. SOURI: When they go through, whatever that cross section is. No, this was underground over here, actually.

E. SOURI: You are right.

M. SOURI: The rails are still under the street.

E. SOURI: It was underground, that is true.

M. SOURI: Where you see the bus stop right now, the streetcar stop was just across. Of course we used to put marbles and glass under to watch the streetcar crush them. [Laughs]

E. SOURI: That's right. Remember doing that.

M. SOURI: You know we never thought we could cause harm or derail the streetcar. You know it was just like, to see how we could crush this…

RUSSELL: Did you go to movies?

M. SOURI: Oh yeah.

RUSSELL: In the neighborhood?

M. SOURI: Yeah. The Atlas Theatre on H Street.

RUSSELL: That was your favorite?

M. SOURI: [Laughs] That was the only one we were allowed to go to.

E. SOURI: We had a cousin on Maryland Avenue. So…

M. SOURI: My grandmother lived there. So on Saturday afternoon, I guess, was my mother's day to go over there or she would go visit her mother. Then we were allowed to go to the movies.

E. SOURI: I think it was two features and a cartoon and a newsreel for 25 cents or something like that.

M. SOURI: I don't remember the price, but I remember that mother would also make him [Elias] baloney sandwiches because he would get hungry. We would sit in the theatre and he'd rattle that wax paper. It would drive me crazy. I was embarrassed. [Laughs]

E. SOURI: I vaguely remember.

M. SOURI: I remember it.

RUSSELL: Do you remember other theatres in the neighborhood?

E. SOURI: There was one over here.

M. SOURI: There were two actually.

E. SOURI: In fact, the building is still here. I have forgotten what it was called.

M. SOURI: The Penn Theatre.

E. SOURI: The Penn, OK.

M. SOURI: And across the street was the Avenue, and we weren't allowed to go in that one at all because not the right kind of people went in there. If we were ever caught going in there we would have… I don't know what they would have done to us.

E. SOURI: Well, some of the theatres were black theatres and some were white theatres. I remember that, and wasn't there one over here called the Home, just north of us?

M. SOURI: On D Street, C Street?

E. SOURI: Something like that on Northeast. There was a black theatre. And so there were white theatres like the Atlas, and then there were those only the blacks would go to.

M. SOURI: But the Penn Theatre over here. It's that building…

E. SOURI: It's not that medical arts building.

M. SOURI: The arcade type of building that used to be a theatre called the Avenue. Of course, we heard all the stories about the Apollo, the one that the roof collapsed during the snow. [Knickerbocker Theatre collapsed January 22, 1926]

E. SOURI: Oh, that one. That was years…

M. SOURI: I think we might even have pictures of it. My parents told us… They remembered that one.

E. SOURI: And then downtown, we used to go to the Capitol, the Keith, oh gosh, what else. There was the Warner.

M. SOURI: Where? Oh the Warner Theatre is still there, though.

E. SOURI: Right.

M. SOURI: Yeah, there was a stage… But there was another one… Palace?

E. SOURI: I believe so.

M. SOURI: The Palace?

E. SOURI: I believe so. But then all of those really folded and, with the rise of the suburbs and the theatres in the outskirts, those… the downtown, the big downtown elaborate theatres the really nice places…

M. SOURI: They were big… similar to the Uptown.

E. SOURI: Nowhere to park so nobody would go any more

RUSSELL: You were saying the building is… you were pointing…

E. SOURI: The building is still there I know it is because I see it every day. It is almost right across from the entrance to the alley here on 11th Street.

(Doorbell rang)

RUSSELL: The doorbell interrupted. So we were talking about this movie theatre in the neighborhood and ones you know, within walking distance.

M. SOURI: Which one, what building?

E. SOURI: This is the Carolina.

M. SOURI: Oh, that's right, I forgot all 'bout that. Here at the corner.

E. SOURI: That's right… the Carolina.

M. SOURI: Oh yeah, I don't think we ever went in there.

E. SOURI: No. And I think the reason why we didn't go in that is because it was a black theatre.

M. SOURI: Was it? Or we just didn't… it showed unsavory movies?

E. SOURI: No I don't believe that. I really don't.

M. SOURI: [Laughs] I don't remember. I just know we weren't allowed to go in there.

E. SOURI: The Penn, if I recall, or the Avenue, I don't know which one. One of them started out as a white movie theatre and then was converted to a black movie theatre, but I don't know which one it was.

M. SOURI: I have a feeling it must have been the Avenue. I can't believe it was the Penn.

E. SOURI: It could have been. We did not go to the Penn that much; I remember going to the Penn maybe once. We almost always went to the Atlas on H Street.

RUSSELL: What else did you do on H Street?

E. SOURI: Well there were small shops, small merchants. I remember there was an optometrist on H Street that I went to frequently. His shop was destroyed in riots.

RUSSELL: In 68? Or before? It had to have been 68 because it is the only time they had…

E. SOURI: It had to be. That's right, when King was assassinated. Then H Street changed after that, but for a long time it was mostly white merchants. Small businesses and small grocery stores.

RUSSELL: Did you do a lot of shopping on H Street?

E. SOURI: My mother did.

M. SOURI: I guess Mom did, yeah.

E. SOURI: But I mean we didn't. We just went along.

RUSSELL: What about Eastern Market? Was that an important place to go?

M. SOURI and **E. SOURI:** No, No.

E. SOURI: Not like it is today.

M. SOURI: Not like it is now. Very few people went over there.

RUSSELL: Why was that?

M. SOURI: I guess basically it was expensive, and then of course the grocery stores, the Safeway and all came up around and it was easier to go to them and get things that you needed. Where, if you went to Eastern Market you could only get some things, and you would still have to go to another grocery store.

E. SOURI: Eastern Market was not as popular in those days as it is now.

RUSSELL: The same as in your parents' time?

E. SOURI: Yes.

M. SOURI: I don't remember them really going over there that much.

E. SOURI: No.

M. SOURI: We would just go there after school; we would walk through or something but we never shopped there.

RUSSELL: So when you were preparing Lebanese delicacies, where did you shop?

M. SOURI: Actually I believe my parents went over to Florida Avenue Market a lot, to a place called Litteri. An Italian store, I believe, is still there, and they would get a lot of the cheeses and things that they would use. And as for Lebanese food, you could basically… any of the grocery stores would get you things, but we did have our own special ethnic stores and there was one at Ninth, again in the Mt. Vernon Square area. I just said the name the other day as my cousin and I were talking about it, because I think she met somebody that was part of that family. It was a Greek-run, and I don't know if you ever went with us or not. I used to go with Mom.

E. SOURI: I have no recollection.

RUSSELL: That was the closest?

M. SOURI: That was the only one that I am aware of. That's why we would go to, like, Italian stores or something, because we could get a lot of the stuff, or they could.

RUSSELL: So when you said your grandmother told your uncle don't take them anywhere, what did that mean?

M. SOURI: It meant he shouldn't take us on the streetcar, but he did it anyway.

E. SOURI: But he did. He used to have a pass.

M. SOURI: I think we still have them. I found one not too long ago.

E. SOURI: Really?

M. SOURI: Yeah. I don't think it was his wallet, but I found the streetcar passes.

E. SOURI: …that he would use. He would show the driver and we would get on.

RUSSELL: No, but why did she say don't take them on the streetcar?

E. SOURI: I think she was afraid that he would get us lost or something. She didn't trust him.

M. SOURI: You know she was afraid he couldn't handle us…

E. SOURI: There was no problem.

M. SOURI: But we weren't going to do anything

RUSSELL: Was she protective of you, particularly?

M. SOURI: I don't know, maybe.

E. SOURI: I think she was more critical of her brother. [Laughs]

(phone rings)

M. SOURI: I think, basically, that my grandmother was just worried that he couldn't handle us. That we might get rambunctious and run around him, but I don't recall us ever doing… I think I was always fascinated with the places he took us.

RUSSELL: I guess I am just asking to figure out whether you had free reign as children to come and go.

E. SOURI: No. Not at all!

M. SOURI: No, we didn't. Uh Uh.

[Laughs]

E. SOURI: We could go to into Lincoln Park, but we weren't allowed really to be over there or maybe we snuck over. I know we would go over there to play… But children were not allowed to play in Lincoln Park.

RUSSELL: By whom?

E. SOURI: Well, It was a law at that time. The police would chase us out.

RUSSELL: If you went into Lincoln Park as a child there would be a sign saying "no playing"?

E. SOURI: Well, I remember seeing a sign saying "no ball playing."

M. SOURI: I remember being chased out.

RUSSELL: A sign saying "no children"?

E. SOURI: Well, I never remember seeing a sign saying "no children," but I remember being chased out of Lincoln Park by the police.

RUSSELL: Really. This is just right across the street.

E. SOURI: Right across the street.

M. SOURI: Right across the street, right there.

E. SOURI: So I mean it is very tempting for kids to want to go over there and play, so we used to. And I remember how long we would be able to manage until the cops came and chased us out.

M. SOURI: Remember, there was like a wooded area over there that we used to play hide-and-seek in. There were rose buses and all kinds of…

E. SOURI: Thick rose bushes.

M. SOURI: Thick rose buses, and we used to go in…

E. SOURI: From the Lincoln statue over to 11th Street, where Peoples Drug store used to be. And there was a row of thick bushes where we were able to run in and out of.

RUSSELL: Were there dogs there then too?

M. SOURI: Probably.

E. SOURI: I don't know. Nothing like what you see now, if that's what you are asking. No. No. No. This is a whole new wrinkle—people walking their dogs out in Lincoln Park. Before, no, there was nobody out there.

RUSSELL: What did people go there and do?

M. SOURI: They had benches.

E. SOURI: Sit. If you were with adults, you were safe. But if you were a gang of kids, you were not.

M. SOURI: No. They had all kinds of benches. More benches than they have now, just all along the place, where people would go sit. Especially in the summertime, because there would be a breeze over there, and people would go sit and get cool.

RUSSELL: There were any play structure that you remember?

M. SOURI: Oh no, no.

RUSSELL: When did that date from?

E. SOURI: Oh I wouldn't know. I mean it would have to be from the 40s into the 50s and into the 50s, of course, things started to change with the entire community.

M. SOURI: Right.

E. SOURI: Definitely, in the 40s and early 50s, there was a restriction on kids playing in the park.

RUSSELL: Playing in the park. Interesting. So as kids living on this block what…

E. SOURI: We would play in the alley. We would play on 12th Street and, of course, there would be kids on 12th Street that we went to Bryan School with, and we would play with them. There were kids also on Kentucky Avenue.

M. SOURI: Well, just one.

E. SOURI: Mariana had a very good friend on Kentucky Avenue, and we would mostly play in the alley, play ball, touch football, baseball—that kind of thing—chase each other around and play cowboys and Indians, that kind of thing.

M. SOURI: Then we would go over to Maryland Avenue with the rest of our cousins and we would play over there on weekends, Sundays, holidays, whatever.

RUSSELL: The Sladens. The alley that is called Sladen's.

M. SOURI: Sladen's Walk.

RUSSELL: Did you know Mr. Sladen?

E. SOURI: Oh sure, sure.

M. SOURI: The one that the alley is named after we knew him better.

E. SOURI: Bill Sladen. [Bruce Sladen]

M. SOURI: Bill Sladen. Of course he had his brother [Milton]. We didn't really see him too much because he was an invalid. But Bill Sladen would be out there a lot, and we would see him, and he was sort of like the neighborhood leader.

M. SOURI: Watch.

E. SOURI: Somebody you would talk to, he was always there.

RUSSELL: So tell me more. What did he do?

E. SOURI: I don't know what he did for a living.

RUSSELL: He was old when you know him?

M. SOURI: No. No.

E. SOURI: He was probably middle-age, but, at our age, anybody was old if you are over 30. I just remember him as a very kind gentleman, someone easy to talk to, very friendly…

M. SOURI: He and Dad were good friends.

E. SOURI: …easily approachable. He and Dad would talk a lot. Of course, the alley was a good meeting place for a lot of people because that is where you washed your car and…

M. SOURI: We never used the front. We always used the back. Everything was done in the back. All the neighbors met in the back…

E. SOURI: And he wanted to improve the lot. I remember that, and I know he did some things. The lot at that time did not look as it looks now. It is much more elaborate now than it looked even when Sladen was there. But he is one who first tried to do something for that lot.

M. SOURI: He kept it really clean. He did all of the garden work, everything out there.

E. SOURI: That's why it ultimately ended up with his name. I don't know what kind of livelihood that he had.

M. SOURI: I think he worked; he had some capacity in the government, but I don't know what it was.

E. SOURI: He was unmarried, and his invalid brother was unmarried, and I believe even the parents lived there at one point.

E. SOURI: It was the family home. Actually…

RUSSELL: What was the address. Where did he live?

E. SOURI: It was the house right here in the alley and 11th.

RUSSELL: The alley and 11th?

E. SOURI: Right where the publisher for the *Voice* [Voice of the Hill newspaper] lives.

M. SOURI: As a matter of fact, they were the oldest family here because they were here 25 years before my grandparents moved here. So they were here, because I remember Milton talking about the neighborhood and saying that he would go over to 13th and East Capitol to a farm to get milk to bring home.

E. SOURI: Milton was the brother.

M. SOURI: He was the brother, yeah.

E. SOURI: He was wheelchair-bound and…

M. SOURI: But not, that was only in later life. He was able to walk but it was difficult.

E. SOURI: I remember him being in a wheelchair.

M. SOURI: He was deformed. He had a hunch back, and it was hard for him to get around but he used to talk about the area and how country it was. Something that just can't quite envision, I just can't, because all these buildings were here when we moved here.

RUSSELL: You know, I never did ask you. What did your Dad do?

M. SOURI: He was a dental technician.

E. SOURI: He made false teeth.

RUSSELL: And where did he go to work.? How far did he have to…

E. SOURI: He was a salesman, and so he was a representative for District Dental Laboratories and he had a car that was provided by his business, and he went into Virginia and Maryland and the District. He was in contact with as many dentists as he could in order to sell them on District Dental products, which was making dentures or full sets. I remember our Dad being down in the basement in the evening making molds for dentures. We still have some of the casts down there in the basement.

M. SOURI: I used to help him because I thought it was fun. I didn't know they were going into people's mouths [Laughs].

E. SOURI: And he did this almost all of his life, his working life. He worked as a soda jerk.

M. SOURI: He was what they call a food manager at Peoples Drug Store at 14th Street NW. He also worked at Seventh Street NW at Peoples Drug Store, and right over here at the corner of East Capitol and 11th Street was a Peoples Drug Store.

E. SOURI: He worked there too.

RUSSELL: He worked there too?

M. SOURI: I think that was a second job.

RUSSELL: Do you have pictures of that?

M. SOURI: I don't know.

E. SOURI: Peoples Drug Store? I don't think so.

M. SOURI: I don't think so.

E. SOURI: He also worked by the Beverly Theatre, which was on 17th. There was an ice house there, and I remember going to the ice house for ice, and there was a movie theatre called the Beverly. And next to it was a sandwich shop, and he worked behind the counter. He would make sandwiches and milkshakes and I don't know…

M. SOURI: That's before he got married.

E. SOURI: Oh yeah, it was. He was much younger.

M. SOURI: District Dental was his job once he got married. All the rest were before he got married.

E. SOURI: Once he got married, then he started in the false teeth business. [Laughs] But before that he was mostly counter- and service-type jobs. He was a very young man then. I suppose that was when the family first moved in here, in the late 20s and early 30s.

M. SOURI: Dad said he was 18 when he moved here. He was a teen. Because he went to Western High School. He graduated from there. It was the only school he ever talked about, so I don't know what other..

RUSSELL: The marriage to your mother was arranged?

M. SOURI: No, I don't think so.

E. SOURI: Not in that sense. I think it was encouraged because our mother was the daughter of the parish priest. Of course, the two fathers knew each other, so it wasn't arranged in the classic sense. I am sure of that..

M. SOURI: All of the young people would gather over on Maryland Avenue. And because there were six kids over there, and then they had friends, and they would all get together. And my father and my mother's brother were good friends. They palled around, they were like brothers; they palled around and did everything. And I think one day,

Dad told me one time, that my uncle Adeeb said to him: “You know, you like my sister don’t you?” And my Dad said yes. He said, “Why don’t you two get married?” Dad said: “oh, maybe.”

E. SOURI: I think it was a very good marriage. It lasted. It was solid, in spite of a lot of difficulties that they had, especially living here in this household with my mother’s in-laws. Who are not really the most comfortable people to live with, but the marriage survived. Mostly I would attribute that to my mother, who had the strength to keep the marriage going. My father had to placate his mother, and she was a very difficult woman to live with. I think, in some ways, she didn’t like the idea of… So in any event my mother’s in-laws, my father’s parents, they were not the easiest people to live with, especially my grandmother, and of course they were all here in this house. My mother was a very diplomatic and tactful individual. But at one point, soon after the marriage, my mother just packed…

E. SOURI: My mother just packed… my mother, she just left and went back to her parents’ home on Maryland Avenue.

M. SOURI: Her mother said “You’re married, go back.” [Laughs]

E. SOURI: And so she did.

M. SOURI: Actually she did it three times more, I gather. She would get mad at my grandparents here because my mother, I guess for the time, was an extremely liberated woman. And that was her upbringing. My… her father made them very independent, and when she came here my mother worked… at the Bureau of Engraving?

E. SOURI: Yes.

M. SOURI: Yes, Mom was like a secretary. She had a very good job, and when she got here and they were married, the first paycheck she got, her father-in-law said, “You have turn your money over to your mother-in-law.” Well, that was NOT going to happen, and my mother said no, this was her money, and she still—you know, I think—gave her parents some money, and no, she wasn’t going to do it, so they had a little misunderstanding about that, and mother packed up and went home. [Laughs]

E. SOURI: There were three bedrooms up on the second floor and the big bedroom—the one that is just above us—was for my father’s parents, and the middle bedroom was for our parents. The back bedroom was for my grandmother’s brother, who lived with us. And of course, after we were born we were in the middle bedroom with our parents because there really wasn’t a lot of place for us to go.

M. SOURI: No, I was in there until I was six months old, and they, from what I have been told, my grandfather, moved me into…

E. SOURI: …the big bedroom in front of the house.

M. SOURI: He wanted me in there with him. And I’ve been in there ever since.

E. SOURI: Of course, when he died, then there was more space for my sister. My sister then shared the bedroom with our grandmother.

M. SOURI: And then you shared with us. There was another bed in there…

E. SOURI: Yes, I did, that true. There were three beds in that bedroom. But when I was a little kid in the crib, I was in the middle bedroom with my parents. I don't know how long that lasted. So it was a crowded house and, like I said, there was one bathroom so at that time nobody thought anything of it.

M. SOURI: And I don't know that it ever felt crowded.

E. SOURI: No, I was never aware that it was, either. Also, a point that I want to bring up: we also still have the World War II ration books.

RUSSELL: Oh you do?

E. SOURI: That I found one day.

M. SOURI: Yeah.

E. SOURI: For each one of us. And they are still here, and we were looking at them and I was astounded realizing those things… and there were these little stamps that you would use in order to get your rations. And we used to have curtains to black out the house.

RUSSELL: You still have those?

E. SOURI: We don't have the curtains, but the places where the rods were are still there. I vaguely remember that.

M. SOURI: Yeah, you're right, vaguely, because I remember—or think I remember—the pocket doors being closed in the dining room when we were in there, so we could turn the lights on.

E. SOURI: In case we were attacked.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/SIDE 1

RUSSELL: You may not feel like parting with all these things.

M. SOURI: Oh, I've thought about a lot of that. There's no sense in us keeping some of this stuff.

E. SOURI: No.

M. SOURI: I don't know what we're going to do…

E. SOURI: Oh no.

M. SOURI: No, no, no. We know what to throw away and what not to. Believe me, because I've still got a lot of the stuff. When the furnace went down there was a coal furnace we had all of that big heavy…

E. SOURI: …the pokers…

M. SOURI: The pokers and the stuff that they must have used. I have to assume that the furnace was a coal furnace when my grandparents moved here. Originally, the house was heated by the three fireplaces. The one here in the living room, the dining room, and the one up in my bedroom was the only heat for this house. Because everything was added later, and…

RUSSELL: Was that in your lifetime?

M. SOURI: No, it was already here.

RUSSELL: Did you put the furnace…?

M. SOURI: Oh yes, it was all here after… when they moved in here, but it was the weirdest thing is that the plugs, the places to put plugs is so odd, like this room has three: here, and over here, and over here.

E. SOURI: The electric outlets.

M. SOURI: In the dining room, there are two. One on each side of the room like this. They are no good to you whatsoever. Up in my bedroom…

E. SOURI: The lamps. I would think this was the sitting room, and therefore there would be more electricity in this room.

M. SOURI: This was a formal room. We weren't allowed in here. This living room was my grandmother's room, believe me, none of this would have been here like this. This was a very—this was a formal room. These French doors were closed. We were not allowed in here. This room got cleaned and the doors were shut and that's it. So we were basically confined to the dining room and the kitchen. Oh, that's right. Do you remember roller skating in here? [Laughs]

E. SOURI: I do. That's true. I remember that, especially going in the basement.

M. SOURI: …in the basement.

E. SOURI: No, no, just when we could get away with it.

M. SOURI: My grandparents had linoleum on the floor, and that was another ordeal. The floors would get washed and then she would put newspaper all over them so they wouldn't get dirty. And you had to pick up your feet [Laughs]. So we don't shuffle today. We'd pick up our feet or the paper would get all messed up and we'd get yelled at.

E. SOURI: You know that reminds me, bringing up the roller-skating thing. You were asking what we were doing, and, of course, in those younger days we had the roller skates that you attach to your shoes. And, of course, you had to have shoes with soles. You couldn't use sneakers or tennis shoes 'cause there was nothing to…

M. SOURI: Nothing to grab…

E. SOURI: That's right… nothing for the skate to grab on to. The skate had a vice-like grip. And I remember one time seeing in a magazine there was a picture of this artifact. It was a skate key and there was no label to it, but the label underneath the picture said anyone born after such and such or before such and such would know what this is, and I knew what it was immediately: it was a skate key. And if you didn't have a skate key…

M. SOURI: Down in the basement. We have a set.

E. SOURI: Do we still? Yeah, we do, and you couldn't attach your skates to your shoes and you couldn't skate. And I remember we would skate up and down the block and all around the block. In those days those were really noisy, noisy things.

M. SOURI: Dangerous too.

E. SOURI: That's true.

M. SOURI: They were.

E. SOURI: And we would skate until the metal wore out.

M. SOURI: Yeah, I mean it. And if you hit a pebble or piece of glass (clap of hands) you were gone. [Laughs]

E. SOURI: The skate would come right off your shoe and you would have to stumble along. And, with your skate key, you'd have to put your skate back on again.

RUSSELL: With clamps?

E. SOURI: Exactly. It would clamp right to the sole of your shoe. It was a lot of fun.

RUSSELL: Now, when you were talking about heat… I just wanted to ask you about summers here without air conditioning.

E. SOURI: Oh yeah. There was no problem at all. [Laughs] We didn't even notice. I was joking about that, now that we have central air. We used to have a rotating fan on the mantle piece in the dining room. That was it. That was the air conditioning. And, of course, in the front and the back would be open, and our grandmother would be sitting in the dining room so she could get the advantage of the fan. We still have upstairs straw fans, which must have been from my grandfather's shop.

M. SOURI: I guess. They were silver, kind of silver sprayed, and we sit and just fan. We found a whole bunch of them when we were cleaning off the third floor.

E. SOURI: And they are upstairs now. And I remember using them when were kids. You could fan yourself and they are very good fans. And that was it. That was the air conditioning.

M. SOURI: I vaguely remember the cross breeze that would come in here because we had screen doors. We just had the screen doors, and in the back we had a screen door, and they would open the regular doors and the cross breeze that would come through would actually bring a breeze in here.

RUSSELL: Did people sleep in the park or anything like that?

E. SOURI: Not that I know of.

M. SOURI: Not that I am aware of. Not to say they didn't.

E. SOURI: I wouldn't know.

M. SOURI: I know we didn't. We were just…

E. SOURI: We didn't really notice the summer heat that much. I don't. It seems like summers are hotter now than they used to be when we were kids, even though the summers then were pretty hot. But we managed. The windows were open, and the fan was on.

M. SOURI: The fan was on, and I think we still have that fan too, down in the basement. I'm telling you there isn't much that anybody got rid of.

E. SOURI: The neighbors next door used to have an ice box, and I remember that. And the ice to keep things cool It was an ice box, it was not a refrigerator. And the ice man would come with his rubber mat on his back and the ice tongs. And bring a cake of ice into their kitchen next door to us and place it in the top of the ice box. Every day the ice man would come and deliver ice.

RUSSELL: Did he have a truck?

E. SOURI: He must have had a truck, I don't remember, but he would have had to have a truck. I remember the iceman coming and delivering a cake of ice to the family next door to put in their icebox He could have to come every day, especially in the summer time, because the ice would melt. And, of course, then the food and such was kept inside this very thick wooden box with a pan underneath to catch the drippings. And I remember seeing the icebox sometimes looking moldy on the inside because it was cool enough to keep the food cold, but very fascinating. When I think about it now it was just so odd but…

M. SOURI: We had a refrigerator.

E. SOURI: We had a refrigerator.

RUSSELL: What other deliveries do you remember? Were there milk deliveries or anything like that?

E. SOURI: We used to have milk deliveries. We used to have a box out front.

M. SOURI: Yeah, you are right.

E. SOURI: We put the empties out, and there would be the cream on the top, and so you would have to shake the milk in order to mix it.

RUSSELL: Other deliveries that you remember?

E. SOURI: I don't think we had any other deliveries. You mean like bread, for instance?

RUSSELL: Or anything?

E. SOURI: Or eggs; no, just milk. We did that for a while. You could take the paper top off the cap and lick the cap because the cream was on it, but you really shouldn't do that because you should really shake the milk first to get the cream mixed…

M. SOURI: …face the pain of death if you were caught doing it. [Laughs]

RUSSELL: How safe did you feel as children, or did you lock the door of the house; what kind of neighborhood was it from that point of view?

M. SOURI: I don't think we ever felt unsafe, I mean at any time that I've lived here, which I have all my life. I've never felt unsafe here.

E. SOURI: To be honest, I don't really think that was an issue until the neighborhood started to turn black, and that's when we… my dad put the iron doors on the basement doors. The iron bars…

M. SOURI: My grandfather had put them on.

E. SOURI: …had been put there for a long time, so maybe that kind of answers your question. There probably were problems, which is the only reason why the iron bars went up and those iron bars had been up for decades.

M. SOURI: He put them up, but I can't tell you when, because the house was robbed and supposedly they were sitting on the front porch and somebody came in the back, and that's what caused him to put the iron bars up. What was taken or anything… nobody ever elaborated on that, I just know that's when the iron bars were put up.

RUSSELL: So when you were living here as children, were the doors always locked or not?

M. SOURI: I don't know. I think at times they weren't, or the only thing was just a little hook on the screen doors, especially in the summer time, because I don't think the doors were always closed. But there was a period of time when nobody really worried about whether the door was locked or unlocked.

RUSSELL: So tell me about the riots.

E. SOURI: I don't know that I remember that much about them. You mean at the time of integration? 1954?

M. SOURI: The one… 1968?

E. SOURI: Or when King was…

RUSSELL: I was thinking of 1968, but I would like to know what else you are referring to.

E. SOURI: Well, when integration started and there was a lot of resentment among the whites about that; there weren't really riots as such, it was just protests.

RUSSELL: Protests?

E. SOURI: And, like I mentioned earlier, the only thing I was ever witness to was the walkout at Hine when integration came in, and the school was deserted and the kids would stand outside of the school pretty much all day long, but—I don't know—I can't really give you too much detail any more. Of course, the school was empty, and we would go to school, and I just know there was resentment about the white kids that went to school, and there weren't that many black children there at the time. But there were no riots as such.

RUSSELL: I meant the 68 riots.

M. SOURI: The 68 riots, I guess, basically, the thing I most remember is smoke. 'Cause nothing really happened around here. Only where there were really businesses, that happened, I know H Street was…

E. SOURI: Was badly damaged.

M. SOURI: …badly damaged. The pall of smoke from fires was basically settled over Lincoln Park. I remember the National Guard standing out on the streets here, and Dad at that time was working at a pet shop…

E. SOURI: That was out at Marlowe Heights.

M. SOURI: …and he had to have a pass because he had to work late at night, and I think there must have been a curfew, and you couldn't be out after a certain time unless you had a pass saying why. I remember he had to have a pass.

RUSSELL: Do you still have that?

M. SOURI: No. That I don't… we're still going through paper.

E. SOURI: I don't think so.

M. SOURI: I don't think so.

RUSSELL: But you weren't scared?

M. SOURI: No, actually, I don't remember being scared. I remember not understanding why people were doing what they were doing and couldn't believe that somebody would just destroy their own places. I guess it was just, like, why would they do things like this? But, no, I don't remember really being scared.

RUSSELL: Were there incidents in the neighborhood?

M. SOURI: No.

RUSSELL: No?

E. SOURI: I can't tell you because I was not here at that time. I was living in Baltimore then. And Baltimore had its own problems at that time, too. But even then when I was in Baltimore I really wasn't witness to much of any of that.

M. SOURI: I didn't see anything happening, let me put it that way. I never saw anybody looting or doing anything. You'd see aftermath… I mean, I guess, like an idiot we would go over to the areas to see what had happened, never thinking that we were in any danger.

E. SOURI: I don't mean to keep jumping back.

RUSSELL: No.

E. SOURI: Speaking of artifacts, I have a newspaper, just one page of a newspaper, that I pulled out of a closet—I think it is 1944—and it has news articles on the war in the Pacific, and I'm trying to unfold it. It is brown and really crinkled, but I am trying to unfold it so that… I don't know how to preserve that. It is a shame, but it was in the bottom of a closet. I picked it out and I was trying… you can read the articles and it gives reports on the war.

RUSSELL: Your dad didn't have to go?

E. SOURI: No, because he was the sole provider.

M. SOURI: He did get a draft notice just before it ended. But yeah, he was a sole provider in this whole house because at the time Mom wasn't working. Because, after I was born, my grandmother said she wouldn't take care of me. They were afraid of me. I was little. I was so little… I was born very prematurely, and they weren't sure I was going to live, so nobody was going to take of me but my mother.

RUSSELL: Did she go back to work after?

M. SOURI: Not until we entered junior high school.

RUSSELL: And what did she do then?

M. SOURI: She worked at Hechinger's. She was in their office, I guess, as a secretary.

E. SOURI: Hechinger's, when it was on Maryland Avenue by Bladensburg Road.

RUSSELL: Oh, where they had Hechinger Mall?

E. SOURI: There used to be a lumber shop—lumber store—actually it was a pretty big operation… Hardware, home improvement sort of thing. It was a big lumber yard.

M. SOURI: She eventually went back into the government and ended up working at the Library of Congress.

RUSSELL: So… you described the kind of decline of the neighborhood.

M. SOURI: Right.

RUSSELL: And the riots contributed to the decline or not?

M. SOURI: Oh I think they did. I am sure they did. People were just going to move. They were going to get away from this because stuff… like this happened in the city; it didn't happen in the suburbs. So they would move out to the suburbs.

RUSSELL: So was there another exodus after the riots or not as much?

M. SOURI: Not as much, because basically the exodus had already happened.

RUSSELL: Yeah?

M. SOURI: But people were afraid to come into the city. I mean, we had cousins and friends that, you know, were living out in the suburbs. I couldn't get them here to this house for anything. It was like, "Well, aren't you afraid?" No, I'm not. You know, I feel very comfortable here. And so did everybody else, but they wouldn't come. It was a long time before we could get people to come and visit.

RUSSELL: When do you think things started to improve?

M. SOURI: Definitely about the middle '70s.

RUSSELL: What caused that to happen?

M. SOURI: The name Capitol Hill. The news media started the term "Capitol Hill," meaning the Capitol and the Congress, and everybody up there and the realtors grabbed on to that name and then started calling the whole area Capitol Hill.

E. SOURI: To me, Capitol Hill was where the Capitol was.

M. SOURI: Right. And that's exactly…

E. SOURI: Now all of a sudden Capitol Hill seems to be going all the way to Anacostia River.

M. SOURI: But the realtors grabbed a hold of that and then the idea of making this another Georgetown.

RUSSELL: What had it been called before?

M. SOURI: Nothing.

E. SOURI: Nothing. [Laughs] Just East Capitol Street. There was a plan—and we even have the plan. By the way, speaking of artifacts, of reconstructing East Capitol Street from the Capitol all the way down to Lincoln Park. And getting rid of the residences and putting in government buildings. And we have that plan which the Lincoln Park Association got, of which my Dad was president for some time, and fought like crazy. This was 1959, I think.

M. SOURI: I think it was 1950…

E. SOURI: But I found the schematic where all the buildings were supposed to be on East Capitol Street and Lincoln Park, and all this was supposed to come down and be turned into some sort of a posh government parkway. Well, it never happened and, of course, I'm glad it never did. But it was one of those great schemes that never went anywhere. But I remember… remember the residents being up in arms about that because they were afraid of losing their homes. Your home would have gone, everybody's home would be gone…

M. SOURI: This whole block would have been a mall.

RUSSELL: Yeah. So before the realtors started calling this Capitol Hill, you don't think the neighborhood had…

E. SOURI: It wasn't called Capitol Hill.

M. SOURI: It wasn't called Capitol Hill at all. It was just part of Washington. It didn't really have any significant name.

E. SOURI: It was just Lincoln Park.

M. SOURI: We knew where the Capitol was known as Jenkins Hill. But even that's kind of gone by the wayside. No one really remembers that.

RUSSELL: So was your Dad active in local politics?

E. SOURI: Just the Lincoln Park Association. They used to meet over here at the church until…

M. SOURI: It was Exworth's. Exworth Street I believe that is what it was called.

E. SOURI: Oh, I don't know what it was called.

M. SOURI: It's the one over here on the corner. They used to meet over there and they had quite a group; quite a gathering.

RUSSELL: Did it come together because of this plan? Or did it…

E. SOURI: No, it pre-existed. But I don't know when it all got started or who started it. But I know he was active in it.

RUSSELL: What did it do before the plan was formulated?

M. SOURI: They met, they basically met for safety in the neighborhood, and there were things that were run down that needed to be taken care of. Like a neighborhood association, just to make sure that everything worked. And if anybody had problems they'd go to them and see what to they could do to fix it up.

E. SOURI: They would meet at night.

M. SOURI: But when this plan came out, it really became active, from what little I remember, but basically it was the papers that we found—I could go back and see what they were talking about.

RUSSELL: I know there was a plan to build a freeway down 11th too.

M. SOURI: Yeah, but I don't think we have anything on that one.

E. SOURI: No.

RUSSELL: Was your Dad involved with that or was it part of the same?

M. SOURI: If it was part—it might have been part of the same, I think—but I know most of it was the idea of all this area going and your houses going and this was going to become a great government complex: a mall to match the other side of the mall.

RUSSELL: Was that plan a response to the decline of the neighborhood?

M. SOURI: No.

RUSSELL: No?

M. SOURI: It was just our congressmen up there wanting to…

E. SOURI: Well, you know, in a way, it could be a means to improve the area because this was in the late 50s when this happened.

M. SOURI: Maybe it was, I don't know.

E. SOURI: It could have been, because this area was in decline at that point, from the late 50s on into the early 70s.

M. SOURI: Could be.

E. SOURI: So I could imagine that it was.

RUSSELL: I'm just unsure here.

M. SOURI: We are too. Because I really don't know without looking at all that stuff and reading.

RUSSELL: Are there any other neighborhood sort of crises or incidents or turning points worth mentioning?

E. SOURI: I'm thinking, I don't really think that there was. The big change—not really a crisis—the big changes when the streetcars went out and the buses came in. Which was a shame, even then, when I was young enough. It was Capitol Transit at that time, that the streetcars were pulled out for the sake of the buses. And I thought that really detracted a lot from the class of the city because streetcars were so much more entertaining, as opposed to buses and their sticky exhaust. I think the city lost a lot when it lost those streetcars. It's a shame they are still not here. Of course, now we have the Metro, but nothing beats those screeching wheels going around the corner.

M. SOURI: I guess part of the problem was that the snow and everything; there would be so many times they couldn't run and you were stuck.

E. SOURI: They used to have sand they would release from the bottom of the car on to the rails in order to give the wheels traction.

RUSSELL: So you traveled around by streetcar a fair bit?

E. SOURI: I did. I remember doing that, sure. Pay your fare dropping it in the slot. You didn't have to worry about correct change because the driver had a little change box on his belt that he could give you change from. It was easy enough to get. I don't know how much it really was—cheap, like fifteen cents— if you wanted to buy tokens. And some of streets around here stayed the same. This is one of my little favorite things about these streets here. 12th Street, for instance, here from East Capitol to South Carolina, is asphalt brick, and also a stretch from 11th to Ninth on South Carolina that is asphalt brick and, of course, there is asphalt brick here in this alley. And if you stand in those streets and you look around you have to understand those streets have been here almost 100 years. The same paving, and it hasn't changed. The only time it has been changed is when the streets have been dug up for utility work. And I stand there and I am in awe that these bricks have been here for so long. You cannot get a concrete- or an asphalt-paved street to last that long. These bricks have been here for decades. Almost 100 years, ever since the neighborhood has been here. And you've got to wonder about that. This is asphalt brick, probably it is because the brick is supple, it gives and there is enough porosity so that water gets in and it drains, and as the street heaves it doesn't do anything. It doesn't even crack.. Asphalt brick—it's been here for I don't know how long. I mean, talk about getting your money's worth out of street paving. My feeling is we should go back to asphalt brick for the neighborhood streets. Maybe not for the high-speed streets, but, by golly, for the alleys and for these small streets we should… It is probably expensive up front, labor intensive, to lay that brick, but once it's down it's in there for good, and I don't see 12th Street here changing, You can walk down 12th Street and look at this asphalt brick. You can walk down 12th Street and look at this asphalt brick, and it ain't going nowhere. But you cannot get concrete paving to last as long as this asphalt brick has lasted. It is amazing, and it is right there under our feet, and nobody seems to pay any attention. [Laughs] Well, anyway, that's my pet peeve. Boy, let me tell you, we used to play on those asphalt bricks when were kids, and they were old when we were kids, and they are still there. Amazing. Talk about getting your money's worth.

RUSSELL: So would you ever live anywhere else?

M. SOURI: Oh, I've thought about it.

E. SOURI: She's prejudiced.

M. SOURI: No I like it… I love it here. I love the area and the convenience of the area. Oh I've thought it. I see houses and have seen, you know, other places, and I think I'll just sell this place and go somewhere else. Nah, I don't think so. It's not that I haven't been other places, I have. I've traveled and everything and I just, I really like it here. I am so happy my grandparents bought this house; I wish I could tell them. [Laughs]

E. SOURI: I wish there wasn't as much traffic out front. It seems like there is much more traffic than there ever was.

M. SOURI: Yes.

RUSSELL: What do you think you like about it?

M. SOURI: I think because it is almost like a little small town kind of idea. I think the people are friendly. You can walk down the street and say hello to people, and nobody seems to mind. I have been in other parts of the city, and you don't just do that. People here at least smile and say hello, if they don't do anything else. I love the idea of a park in front of the house, and I know that nobody else will be building over there. It doesn't seem crowded here, the way it does in other parts of the city. And I like the convenience to the museums and the Capitol and all the buildings, and I can walk to them.

RUSSELL: By the way, I forgot to ask you about the moving of the Lincoln statue, do you remember that?

E. SOURI: Uh huh.

M. SOURI: Turned around, yes.

RUSSELL: Do you remember were people… Was that an issue at the time?

M. SOURI: I think we were all kind of upset. We didn't like him having his back to the Capitol, but I know why they did it. They wanted the statue of Mary Bethune McLeod [McLeod Bethune]; they wanted them to face each other.

RUSSELL: Yeah.

M. SOURI: But I think a lot of people were kind of upset when they turned him to have his back to the Capitol, because they didn't want that. I don't think it was a very big thing.

RUSSELL: When did they put her statue in? For the record do you remember?

M. SOURI: No.

E. SOURI: 70s?

M. SOURI: It was sometime in the 70s.

E. SOURI: Late 70s?

M. SOURI: They kind of renovated the park. That's when they took out all the old bushes and stuff and did the park over.

E. SOURI: If I remember, not only was the statue turned but it was also moved a little bit further west. It isn't in the same position, same place.

M. SOURI: It's in the same place.

E. SOURI: So it's just turned. I thought it was moved as well.

M. SOURI: I don't know how they did that. I honestly don't.

E. SOURI: And I remember there was controversy about the statue at some point because of the slave kneeling at Lincoln's feet. And I remember resentment among blacks that there's a black man kneeling at a white man's feet. And that really wasn't the whole point.

M. SOURI: That really wasn't the idea of that statue.

E. SOURI: The statue symbolizes the liberation of the slaves. And, but I remember hearing that, and, of course, it didn't go anywhere. And I'm glad it didn't, because it's a beautiful statue, and I think it represents a great moment in our history. And I'm glad its still out there. It really adds a lot to Lincoln Park, its part of the city's history.

M. SOURI: Well the park is an act of Congress. It was put there specifically for that statue.

E. SOURI: Then, of course, I am prejudiced. I was raised when the Lincoln statue was the only statue in the park, and I don't see where the statue of Mary Bethune adds to Lincoln Park. It's Lincoln Park, and it should stay that way. So, I suspect because of the large black population of Washington DC that the statue of Mary Bethune was put up. I still believe that the park belongs exclusively to Lincoln's statue. And for what it means. And I believe that the statue was erected or was constructed from money that was collected from ex-slaves. I think it says so on the plaque.

M. SOURI: It is, and it is true.

E. SOURI: Right there on the statue. It should be exclusively for Lincoln [the park], but you know, obviously it's not.

M. SOURI: Well, the thing of it is that he was put there in a direct line with the Capitol and the monument and the Lincoln statue—I mean the Lincoln Memorial. A direct line, if we can see it there, they are all in line.

E. SOURI: There is probably more stuff, I just don't know…

RUSSELL: I am sure, I am sure. You know, things I have forgotten to ask you, and maybe there will be a follow up.

M. SOURI: Oh, great. That's fine.

RUSSELL: There will be a chance to…

M. SOURI: Actually, I guess I remembered more than I thought.

RUSSELL: Well, if you think…

E. SOURI: [Laughter] Do you want to think of a closer and ending?

[Laughter by all]

RUSSELL: Well, I probably didn't comprehensively question you as much as I should about your parents. These are probably things you don't really think about when you're a child. They are not important to you.

E. SOURI: No, that's true, you take them for granted.

M. SOURI: I think more now about some of the questions I wish I could have asked. About pictures, and things about people. We haven't… We don't know who… We just found a post card, was it 1921?

E. SOURI: 1921.

M. SOURI: From…

E. SOURI: Relatives.

M. SOURI: Relatives in the old country to my uncle, the one that lived here. My grandmother's brother from his aunt.

E. SOURI: His aunt.

M. SOURI: Chastising him for not staying in touch.

E. SOURI: For not writing.

M. SOURI: For not writing.

E. SOURI: This is so typical.

M. SOURI: And the more we think about it. Oh my glory, this is my grandmother.

E. SOURI: It gives people some depth. When we were kids, we really didn't pay any attention to our relatives that much. But when you see these things you realize that they had lives of their own. Probably just as complicated as ours and just as trouble-filled. And, but we didn't know about them. They never said anything, we never had the good sense to quiz. We had no clue, for heaven sakes. But now we begin to see these little nuances. And we know that they must have had lives in depth that we just had no… That we know nothing about. And as children, how could we?

RUSSELL: And you don't remember much of World War II—or do you?

E. SOURI: I remember this much. Down at Union Station plaza at the time Germany surrendered, cause our dad took us down there.

M. SOURI: And I didn't know why.

E. SOURI: Well, I didn't know either. The plaza was lit up, and it was a sea of people. And I distinctly remember a car with its roof crushed in because of all the people that were on top of it, and we were in the

periphery. I think we must have gone down in our car, which, I don't know, was a Plymouth, 1937 Plymouth.

M. SOURI: Yeah, 1937.

E. SOURI: 1937 Plymouth, that thing lasted until 1949. And, so we were down at Union Station plaza. I must have been three or four years old. No, four years old—and specifically, distinctly remember this car that had its roof caved in. Cause people were piled up on top of the car. But it was a sea of people that was down there celebrating the end of the war.

M. SOURI: Yeah, there were a lot of people and noise, but I didn't know until a lot later what it was all about.

RUSSELL: What about boarding houses?

M. SOURI: Actually, they had they had them along here. I think where Mrs. Lenski lived. I think that was a boarding house at one time.

E. SOURI: You mean here on East Capitol.

M. SOURI: Yeah, I think they did during World War II. A lot of people opened their houses, and actually where Liz and Michael live [1121 East Capitol SE]. Mrs. Keel, she had those rooms all broken up into I don't know how many rooms at that house.

RUSSELL: 1121 East Capitol?

M. SOURI: Yes, yes. It was a boarding house when she moved out. I forgot who moved in there after them, cause we all went in to see what this house looked like. Because there were so many people there that she had as boarders. And she had taken the bedrooms and basically halved them, there are basins in there, and they had the hall bathrooms. You had to go in and look.

RUSSELL: I think there are six bathrooms there now.

M. SOURI: Yeah, they were put in by her, as far as I know.

E. SOURI: Katherine Keel.

M. SOURI: Yeah, and her husband. I forgot his name.

E. SOURI: He was a architect, I believe, and worked in his basement. They moved to Michigan.

M. SOURI: Yeah, they moved to Michigan. But they had… at least she did, I'm not sure… but they had boarders in there. I don't know if it was legal, to be honest with you. I really don't think it was, but she had lots of people coming and going out of there; it was fascinating. [Laughter]

RUSSELL: So those were the two boarding houses on the block?

M. SOURI: Yeah, because down at the corner, they were always apartments.

RUSSELL: Oh.

M. SOURI: They were always apartments.

RUSSELL: And what happened to the Peoples drugstore you mentioned?

M. SOURI: It just closed.

RUSSELL: Where was it?

M. SOURI: It's the corner. They are condos. It's the corner of…

E. SOURI: From the corner of Massachusetts Avenue to East Capitol Street. It was a drug store.

M. SOURI: Between Massachusetts Avenue, that corner, that whole corner was People's Drug Store.

RUSSELL: That red brick?

E. SOURI: Yeah

M. SOURI: Yeah

E. SOURI: The entrance was in the center, facing the park.

RUSSELL: And so the building was wrecked to put up that…?

E. SOURI: No, it's the same building, they just renovated it.

M. SOURI: Oh yeah.

E. SOURI: It didn't change

RUSSELL: You can't see much of the…

E. SOURI: I think that went by the wayside too, with the change in the neighborhood. There was petty thievery, stuff like that. Dad worked there.

M. SOURI: Yeah, he did.

E. SOURI: And I think that they just had trouble with their customers, and ultimately Peoples decided to close it because it was no longer profitable. Which is part of the general decline of the whole neighborhood. So ah, and that's why it closed. But I remember going in there, any number of times.

M. SOURI: Oh yeah, we used to play in there. Because we knew everybody.

RUSSELL: Yeah.

M. SOURI: Dad worked there.

E. SOURI: It had terrazzo floors too, I remember that. Cause it always looked so odd to me. And then speaking of businesses, there was Sam's. And Sam was… He was Arabic. And that… Sam's is that basement grocery store that had been there for years. And the name stuck long after Sam was gone, and it only just changed, like within the last two years, when this gourmet deli went in.

M. SOURI: Right

RUSSELL: Yeah.

E. SOURI: And that's where the name Sam came from. And the guy was… His name was Sam Shamma, and was Arabic. And I remember going in there and Sam would be in there. It was a sleazy store. [Laughter]

M. SOURI: I used to hate going in there. My grandmother used to send me over there to pick up some things. I hated going in there. It was a sleazy place. I'm sure it wasn't, it just seemed like it.

E. SOURI: When the Shamma family finds out we said that we are going to be in trouble. But ah… [laughter]

M. SOURI: But no. He used to run numbers in there. That's what dad used to say.

E. SOURI: So, Sam was there for the longest time, and, of course, he died but the name stuck, and it was taken over. It was never really an upscale store. And I think the attempt now is to try to bring it up.

END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 1

TAPE 2/SIDE 2

RUSSELL: Your parents, are they buried in Congressional Cemetery?

M. SOURI: No.

E. SOURI: They are… No, they are in Glenwood.

RUSSELL: Glenwood?

M. SOURI: That's over off of North Capitol.

E. SOURI: What is it, Lincoln Road?

M. SOURI: Lincoln Road. Actually, um, its oh, over there… it sounds like…

E. SOURI: Just east of North Capitol.

RUSSELL: Oh, yeah, I know where that is.

M. SOURI: All of our family is over there.

RUSSELL: All your family is over there?

M. SOURI: All my grandparents, my parents, aunts, uncles, cousins. It's a… it's a mixed cemetery. There's a whole section that's practically Arabic.

RUSSELL: Oh. Cause you said something about Congressional Cemetery?

E. SOURI: Well, the only reason why I mentioned that is that I had just been over there, that's all. Just to see the Overbeck grave. "Look it up." And that's the only reason why I mentioned it. We have some relatives over at Cedar Hill. Just outside the District. Most of them, almost all of them, are in Glenwood.

M. SOURI: Actually, we just found our relatives there at Cedar Hill, last summer.

E. SOURI: Right, I had to go over there with a shovel. Nobody caught me at it, [laughter] but just digging around the graves. But we were able to uncover some plaques, that had been grown over in the last fifty years.

M. SOURI: My grandfather Souri's brother, niece, sister, that we didn't know about. It was terrible; it was like a child in a candy shop. We're going from here to there and saying, "Oh look ! This has got to be…" And then we would ask some of our other relatives to… "Ok, we've got these names, do you know who they are?" And they were able to tell us.

E. SOURI: Speaking of George Souri reminds me of the story that our dad told us about a gambling place called Fontana.

M. SOURI: Fontaines.

E. SOURI: Fontaines. Fontaines, out on Bladensburg Road. I think on the Maryland side.

M. SOURI: It was a place on the border. Half of it was on the Maryland side, half of it was on the District side.

E. SOURI: Yeah, that's what I heard, right.

M. SOURI: It was gambling house. And when they would find out there was going to be a raid in Maryland, they would move everything into the District side. And vice versa.

E. SOURI: Apparently, it was a pretty popular place. And our uncle George, who died way early— I think 1942—used to frequent Fontaines. Apparently, he was very popular, out in the boonies.

RUSSELL: The boonies of Bladensburg?

E. SOURI: Right [Laughter]

M. SOURI: For the short time they were here, they did a lot of stuff.

RUSSELL: Your parents were active in this church.

M. SOURI: Oh yeah, the whole family.

E. SOURI: Oh, sure.

RUSSELL: And you're continuing the activities? And how far away do you have to go?

M. SOURI: About a half an hour; it's not far.

E. SOURI: They are on 16th and Webster.

M. SOURI: Right. And I've done everything. I'm on the parish council. I've been an adviser to the team. Worked. Whatever anybody wants I'll do. And my brother was Sunday school superintendent. It was a memorable period.

E. SOURI: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. Did my time in the trenches.

M. SOURI: And we have just been there.

RUSSELL: Yeah, I know you're very active there. Have you ever been active in city politics?

M. SOURI: No.

E. SOURI: No. That is something that we never really wanted to get into. I think that's a good point. Our family were strictly merchants, small-time people, immigrants. And nobody ever really got involved in any sort of city politics at all. And we were never encouraged, and I think our parents really didn't care about it that much. They were just mostly concerned about family. So you would think that, being now third-generation, we would somehow be involved in city politics. But we're not, and never have been. And, to this day, I don't think we have any inclination, or any of our relatives.

M. SOURI: As I say, its basically—I don't know how to use the word—clannish.

E. SOURI: Could be. It's the mindset that we just were not involved in city politics. We were more involved in family and in just getting by. And so to us city politics and even federal politics is another world. It just doesn't exist in ours. We're city natives, city relatives. Not relatives, I mean residents. But never really involved in the city's politics at all. And no desire, either. I think that is just something that we picked up. No one ever said, "you can't go into Washington's politics." It was just that our role models were never involved. Didn't want to be, and we didn't, and we just picked up on that. So no.

M. SOURI: I guess our activities were all with family or with church. And that was it.

RUSSELL: So home rule and so on does not interest you.

E. SOURI: No.

M. SOURI: Uh-uh.

E. SOURI: Actually, we are opposed to home rule. I don't see how that's going to be possible without a tax base. There is no industry other than the government. I don't know where the taxes are going to come from to support a state of Washington DC.

M. SOURI: No, we never did, I guess its just—I don't know—something that, as my brother said, that was not of any real interest. Not that everybody didn't look after or care the city. They did. Because nobody ever really ever moved out. There were a few who moved out. Or, if they did move out… My aunt moved to Anacostia, which at that time was like a suburb. And, oh, that was horrifying, they moved out to Anacostia. So far away. It was no longer walking distance. [laughter]. Cause, basically, that's where everybody lived, within walking distance. And they visited; they were always in each other's house. The story goes that over in Maryland Avenue my grandmother would get up at six in morning and she'd open the front door. And people would be sitting in the yard waiting for her to open the door, and come in—make coffee, and come in and have coffee.

RUSSELL: Were they her relatives or people she knew?

M. SOURI: People she knew, not necessarily relatives. It was just people she knew. They knew she got up early and she'd make coffee, and they were just waiting outside.

E. SOURI: Well, being the wife of a priest, she was expected to have a house open to the community, to the Arabic community. And she was very hospitable. Right, she didn't really have a life of her own. She was constantly hosting other people for her husband's sake. I don't think you would find that sort of attitude anymore in the wife of a priest. They want to have their own home life. But, in those days, that was not the case at all. It was like a parish house, so it was open to the Arabic community—whoever wanted to come in. And they expected it. They thought that this was their due. It was very difficult life for a priest's wife. And, to me, that's a very good point. A priest can go to a seminary and learn how to be a priest, but there was no school to teach a priest's wife how to be a priest's wife. And I think that is very difficult situation for the wife to be in. I can sympathize, when I think of my grandmother and what she had to put up with in her own home in order to placate the parish for her husband's sake. In order to just keep peace within the parish. And there is very little home life. Yet, with all of that, she was able to raise all of these children. And manage and live into her nineties, I believe.

M. SOURI: Yeah, she was close to a hundred. She didn't quite make it, but she did live into her nineties.

E. SOURI: But I think the community killed our grandfather. And I know my mother was resentful of that, because he had to put up with a lot of nonsense with the Arabic community. Family squabbles, whatever—if you sided with one you were against the other. That kind of thing. And I'm sure, and my mother was convinced… she was very resentful that people were so demanding of her father, and he was so giving that it ultimately killed him. And she thinks he just died prematurely. And, as a result, I've been always very

defensive about our grandfather and his memory. And it should be preserved, because he did a lot. And it's very likely, it was the parish that killed him. We still belong to it. And we are very supportive of the priests. And I think we're very supportive of the priests because it's the priests who really… They have to put up with a lot, and we don't like parishioners who complain about the priests. Because they have to do a lot.

RUSSELL: You know what we should do is spell out all the names of all your grandparents. Just start.

E. SOURI: OK, then. We'll start with my father's parents and his father was Elias Nicholas Souri.

RUSSELL: OK.

E. SOURI: And then his wife was K-A-R-I-M-E-H. That's how I spell it.

M. SOURI: What they did, basically, was to make it easier for people to say it, which would make it K-A-R-E-E-M-Y. People can say it that way. But they still have difficultly with it.

E. SOURI: And then on our mother's side. Her parents: her father's name was Job.

M. SOURI: That's English.

E. SOURI: Salloom: S-A-L-L-O-O-M. His wife's name was Phoebe. P-H-O-E-B-E.

M. SOURI: Yeah. P-H-O-E-B-E

E. SOURI: It's a Greek name. I think it means dark.

RUSSELL: Job?

E. SOURI: Yeah.

M. SOURI: Or in Arabic it's "Ayoub". A-Y-O-U-B.

RUSSELL: A-Y-O-U-B. And your parents?

E. SOURI: Well my dad was Nicholas Elias Souri.

M. SOURI: And he's Elias [referring to speaker, i.e. her brother].

E. SOURI: Well, we'll get to that in a minute.

M. SOURI: (Laughter) Had to keep the name going.

E. SOURI: And then our mother was Mary.

RUSSELL: Mary

E. SOURI: Yeah, she didn't tell anybody.

RUSSELL: We can look this up, you know, we can look up in the directory, the records of your parents and their businesses.

E. SOURI: You know that I've been trying to do that (both speaking), and I've been trying to look up the Washington archives, on the web. And either I'm doing something wrong. I can't find the information that I want. I'd like to get over to the Recorder of Deeds, and see if I can pick up records of the old Church deeds that no longer exist, the old building.

RUSSELL: Well, a good place to start is the Martin Luther King library, in a room called Washingtoniana. And they have copied of a lot original records or microfilm copies of originals, as well as a lot of city directories, old city directories. Where you can look people's names and where they are living.

E. SOURI: That would be neat, I would like to do that.

RUSSELL: The librarians are very well informed. So If you just approach them and tell them what you want to know, they will just find you the records. They will tell you where they are.

E. SOURI: Great, because I've got a whole load of stuff I'd like to look up.

RUSSELL: Yeah, they might not have everything, but they will tell you. They will have a good idea. Its on the third floor of the Martin Luther King Library.

E. SOURI: OK, it's one of my journeys.

RUSSELL: OK, well thank you very much for all of this time. Giving up your afternoon. Its been a fascinating story.

E. SOURI: It's been fun. You know, once you get rolling, its easy to keep going.

RUSSELL: Well, its been a privilege, thanks. End of November 23rd interview.

END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 2

TAPE 3/SIDE 1

RUSSELL: This is December 16th. I am back with a follow-up interview with Mariana and Elias Souri because we wanted to talk further about the desegregation of public schools in Washington. Because they (i.e., Mariana and Elias) were involved in the whole process.

M. SOURI: Right.

RUSSELL: And it seems like an opportunity that we shouldn't miss. I hadn't asked you too much about it when we were here before because we had so many other things to discuss. But we will focus more sharply on that particular episode. And maybe other things that you think of that come up, but—

E. SOURI: That was in 1954, that's when Eisenhower began desegregation. And it all happened all at once. There was no gradual going into it. There were no increments, just desegregating.

M. SOURI: This day it was going to start, but I don't remember even what day. But was this day it was going to start. And there it was.

RUSSELL: Tell me what month it was?

M. SOURI: You know, I don't remember.

E. SOURI: Except that it was fairly good weather, but cool. So it was probably, either in the early fall or late winter. I wish I knew. I really can't remember.

M. SOURI: I knew… It would have to be in September, when school started, or October.

E. SOURI: I would imagine, but it wasn't hot weather.

M. SOURI: No, but I remember walking. You know walking to school. I don't remember wearing a coat or anything like that. So it had to have been at the beginning of the school year.

RUSSELL: So it was slated for the beginning of the school year?

M. SOURI: I think so. I could be wrong with that. I honestly don't know.

E. SOURI: I just remember that school was in session at the time.

M. SOURI: Yeah.

E. SOURI: And I have a feeling that it had been in session for sometime, when desegregation occurred. So I don't believe it was one of those things where desegregation happened during the summer, and when the new school year started. I don't think it was like that at all. And I was trying to think of this because I was afraid you were going to ask that question. But I just remember that the school year was already in progress at the time desegregation occurred.

RUSSELL: You said you were in grade…?

E. SOURI: Well, I don't know what grade I was in, but it was over in Hine at the time. Both of us were at Hine.

M. SOURI: Both of us, yeah.

E. SOURI: I must have been thirteen.

M. SOURI: You probably just started Hine. So I…

E. SOURI: It was 1954, so I would have been thirteen. Which put me in the seventh grade. Which would have been my first year.

M. SOURI: Right, yeah, and I was at the eighth.

RUSSELL: Tell me what this classroom was like before, if you have an idea? How many children in the class?

E. SOURI: Oh, I couldn't tell you.

RUSSELL: More or less. Thirty? (all speaking together)

M. SOURI: About that. Between twenty and thirty.

E. SOURI: They weren't huge classes.

M. SOURI: But they weren't particularly small, either.

E. SOURI: They weren't affluent either. I remember that.

M. SOURI: Yeah, that's true.

E. SOURI: They were mostly people who had moved into the District from outlying areas: Virginia, Maryland, that sort of thing.

M. SOURI: Actually, we weren't even supposed to go to Hine. We were supposed to go to Eliot. But somehow Mom didn't want us to go over there because this was closer. She wanted us to go to Hine because it was easier.

RUSSELL: Where is Eliot?

M. SOURI: Eliot is behind Eastern High School.

M. SOURI: I don't know how she did it, or how she got us to go to Hine.

RUSSELL: Excuse me, but is Eliot still there?

M. SOURI: Yeah.

RUSSELL: Eliot Junior High School?

M. SOURI: Yeah. Oh you know what? [mother got them into Hine] She knew through the Scriveners [friends on Kentucky Avenue]. They knew the principal. I'll never forget her name. Her name was Mrs. Draper. She scared the heck out of me. She was just a very formidable lady. And, I tell you, she would walk down the hall, and you would just say hello, good morning. And you wouldn't do anything; you knew not to do anything. And I think it was through the Scriveners that she got us in the [school]. They were a family on Kentucky Avenue, they were rather… They were affluent lawyers.

RUSSELL: You were good friends with them?

M. SOURI: Oh yeah. That was the one, I think I told you early on, that I was approved to play with their daughter.

RUSSELL: And she went to Hine as well?

M. SOURI: No, no, by that… No, she didn't go to Hine. She was going to a private school then. Yeah, she went to Bryan, the elementary school. But she didn't go to Hine or to Eastern.

RUSSELL: So you had been at Hine for a year?

M. SOURI: A year, yeah.

RUSSELL: And would you say that… um, that people were more or less the same, who were in those classes? More or less the same income, more or less the same… you know, belong to the same categories?

E. SOURI: I think so.

M. SOURI: Yeah. Right. I am trying to think of… I guess what I remember most about the segregation: outside there were kids, but inside it was very quiet. To me, it felt that people were walking on eggs. They were afraid to do or say anything. They just might get things upset.

E. SOURI: I remember the walkout. And I don't know what day of the week it was, or when it happened. But school was in session for that day. And some of the kids simply got up and walked out of the classes. Saying that they were walking out. And the teachers didn't do anything at the time.

M. SOURI: Right.

E. SOURI: But then, just gradually, more and more kids walked out. I guess as the word went around the school. So pretty soon all of the kids, just about, were outside of the schoolyard, out on the street. And I remember kids being out on Eighth Street, outside the fence. And some were saying they were going on strike or that they were going on a walkout. So it was like a big party atmosphere, once it got started. There

was no hostility; it was not a riot. It was just kids leaving the school. The problem is that it was just an excuse to get out of the school. So…

RUSSELL: When did this… The first day that the school was desegregated, did it happen that day?

E. SOURI: I don't believe so, no.

M. SOURI: No, I don't think it was the first day. It was more like the second or third day.

RUSSELL: But fairly soon?

M. SOURI: Fairly soon afterwards. And I also remember a lot of them were just having a good time. I think they were taking it as a joke, more than anything.

RUSSELL: So the first day that the school was integrated, did you have more children in the classroom than you had had before, or did some kids leave in order to make room for…?

E. SOURI: Oh, I see what you are saying.

RUSSELL: Did the number…?

E. SOURI: No, I don't think much of that changed. In fact, there weren't that many black kids who came in right away. It wasn't as if there was a huge influx of black children into the school at this time. As I recall, it was more like just a few came in.

RUSSELL: Say, in your classroom, it would possibly be how many?

E. SOURI: Five.

RUSSELL: Five?

M. SOURI: It was just a few. (speaking together)

E. SOURI: There weren't that many.

RUSSELL: All the same?

M. SOURI: Yeah, the same. Four, six at the most; it was no huge influx. Cause I'm trying to think of junior high. Where did most of the blacks go? Oh, Tyler, Chamberlain—that was a vocational school that's still over there. I don't remember the street, but it was still over that way. So only when they started transferring from those schools into Hine.

E. SOURI: But that didn't happen right away. Most of the neighborhoods were still white. And so the school still drew on the white neighborhoods. It was only after the neighborhoods started changing, and it started happening really fast. Like, within the next two years. So that's when the school just about turned all black. It was a gradual process.

M. SOURI: It wasn't a huge influx at any one time.

RUSSELL: So they hadn't filled up with black kids who came into your class. Would you say that they were from the same, you know, level of affluence, or…

E. SOURI: I don't really recall, but I doubt that.

RUSSELL: You doubt that?

E. SOURI: But I feel that we were from the same income-level as most of the blacks of that particular time. They just happened to live in the area where they could attend the school, Hine. But I don't recall any of them being any more affluent than the whites that were there. Probably the same or less.

RUSSELL:. Or less. So the way the spoke, the way they dressed, was similar to you or not?

E. SOURI: I think it was similar. I don't think that they were the same as… No, I think they were different.

RUSSELL: Did they… What do remember about first day? Did those kids stick together? Did they talk to you? Was there much interaction?

E. SOURI: My impression was there wasn't. They pretty much kept to themselves. And, if I were in their shoes, I would have felt a little bit intimidated by the entire process. I mean, after all, they were in the minority at that time.

RUSSELL: And what about… Was there a cafeteria?

E. SOURI: Hmmm. There was.

RUSSELL: Did you go there?

E. SOURI: No.

M. SOURI: No (laughter by all)

E. SOURI: We took our own lunches. But that had nothing to do with… (all talking)

M. SOURI: No. My mother always made our lunches for us. And occasionally, we were allowed to go across the street to a Woolworth's, and they had a soda fountain or whatever.

RUSSELL: Were all the teachers white?

E. SOURI: Yes, they were.

RUSSELL: And how did they react to the kids, do you remember?

M. SOURI: I don't remember reacting any different. They were there to teach, and that's what they did.

E. SOURI: If there was any resentment, I don't remember seeing any of it.

M. SOURI: No, I just… as I said, I remember the principal, Mrs. Draper, and she was basically no-nonsense. I mean you were there to learn; they were there to teach. And that's exactly what you did.

RUSSELL: She didn't have an assembly to talk about this event happening or…?

M. SOURI: I don't recall one.

E. SOURI: I don't either.

RUSSELL: You don't remember being counseled on the whole process?

M. SOURI: No, no. Not at all.

E. SOURI: No. And you know I thought about that earlier, when we found out that you wanted to make this recording. There really was no preparation. I think if there had been something—anything—beforehand, to try to ease the situation, maybe there wouldn't have been a walkout at the time. Or, if there had been, it wouldn't have been as extensive at is was. I think having integration just descend, one day yes, the next day no—I mean, it was just an on-and-off switch. People were not really ready for it. It sounded great on paper, I suppose. But come to the reality, there was too much prejudice for people to accept at any one time. They needed preparation, and they never got it. And anything after the fact was sort of like, well, it was a little too late. But I don't remember any kind of assembly or anything to try to ease the situation. I remember that it was about thee days' worth. In other words, the kids all stayed out for about that long. Hanging around on the outside. We went because our parents wanted us to go. I wasn't really very comfortable doing that, because you'd have to walk past your schoolmates to get into the schoolyard. And I remember not… It was not a pleasant occasion. I don't know what was said, but I just recall that it wasn't easy to go through the crowd to get into the school.

M. SOURI: My mother went with us. But I don't remember whether she walked us or whether she drove us. I thought… I don't remember, but I know she would go with us. Because she was afraid that there might, you know, be trouble. And she didn't want us to be injured.

E. SOURI: Of course, the school was empty, because all the white kids were outside.

RUSSELL: Let me start at the beginning of this walkout. Do you know what classes started it? Do you know who started it?

E. SOURI: No, no.

RUSSELL: It didn't start in your particular class?

E. SOURI: I don't recall just where it started. I remember seeing some of the boys walking, the first ones that I saw.

RUSSELL: Were they in your class?

E. SOURI: They were kids that I knew. It's the only way I can answer your question. They were friends of mine. Kids that I was acquainted with in the school. So, if they were in our classroom… they could have been. I just don't

recall. But I do know that they were kids that I knew. And I remember that they were boys first. The girls did too. They followed later. I think I remember the impression I was surprised at some of the people who did walk out, that I didn't expect would do that.

RUSSELL: Did they make any statement when they were going?

E. SOURI: Just that they were walking out—were going out on strike.

RUSSELL: Just that they were walking out, were going on strike. They did it because… Or was it understood?

E. SOURI: It was understood. Everybody knew why. And they didn't want to go to school with the blacks. And so they were going to stay out of the school.

RUSSELL: So, if this might have happened during a class… was a teacher there?

E. SOURI: Uh huh.

M. SOURI: Oh yeah, I (all speaking together). The teachers didn't do anything or stop anybody.

E. SOURI: I don't think the teachers did anything to stop anybody. I mean it was very easy for the kids to walk out of the school at the time.

RUSSELL: So, if it started… perhaps do you remember what time of day, maybe?

E. SOURI: Probably, morning.

RUSSELL: Morning.

E. SOURI: Some time when school first convened, for that particular day.

RUSSELL: How long did the whole the process take for…

E. SOURI: For the walkout on that day?

RUSSELL: Yes, for example from the time the first kid walked out until it was obvious that it was a mass movement?

E. SOURI: Oh, I would say it didn't take any more than just a few hours. Once the word got around, then kids started leaving in droves.

RUSSELL: So by… how long would it have taken for them to have left the school?

E. SOURI: Less than three hours.

M. SOURI: I'd say about noon. Basically, I guess by lunch time.

RUSSELL: By lunch time?

M. SOURI: Yeah.

RUSSELL: That most of the school was out?

M. SOURI: And they basically, just hung around outside.

RUSSELL: They didn't have signs?

E. SOURI: No.

M. SOURI: No.

E. SOURI: This was spontaneous.

M. SOURI: We weren't into that yet (laughter all around).

E. SOURI: They weren't organized.

M. SOURI: It wasn't organized at all. It was just one or two did it, then different ones just started to following.

E. SOURI: It was like this gradual build up and, all of sudden, you know, all the kids were going.

M. SOURI: Yeah.

RUSSELL: But you didn't go?

E. SOURI: No.

M. SOURI: No.

RUSSELL: And how many stayed behind?

E. SOURI: Actually, I didn't know what to do. I didn't really want to go with the kids that were going out at the time because I felt that it was not the right thing to do. Yet at the same time I felt awkward staying in there. Because I felt, well, I'm not doing what they are doing. Sort of like peer pressure.

RUSSELL: So, in your classroom, how many stayed behind?

E. SOURI: There must have been some who did. I don't recall who did. But I recall that I was not alone in my class, but I don't know who exactly stayed. It was a comfort, but you're outnumbered. That was not comfortable.

M. SOURI: No, not at all.

E. SOURI: So, to me, I felt torn. I felt like…

M. SOURI: I didn't know what to do. I knew that if I walked out and did that, I had to come home and face my parents. So, it was like, you didn't do it because of them. You know, wondering why you did it, because you are

supposed to be in school. And then on the other hand, it was like you're not doing what your fellow students are doing. And you should be doing it, but you don't want to do it. It was extremely hard.

RUSSELL: So, in your classroom, what would you say how many stayed?

M. SOURI: Oh, basically a handful. Maybe ten, but I can't even say it would be that many. And some of them were… I know when they walked out, they didn't have a clue why they were walking out. They just went with everybody else. And it was like, well these others are doing it, so we'll just get off of school.

RUSSELL: So, they hung around outside for the rest of the day?

E. SOURI: Yes.

M. SOURI: Uh-huh. And once it was time to go home they went home.

RUSSELL: Did anybody speak to them when they were outside?

E. SOURI: I don't remember.

M. SOURI: I don't remember any teacher or the principal—anybody coming out to say anything. It was just as if they were… My impression that they were just going ahead and letting them do this. Trying not to cause any trouble, and it would just take care of itself.

E. SOURI: I imagine that the police did come. But I don't remember seeing any of them. I would have imagined that they would have responded.

RUSSELL: And when you were leaving at the end of the day, was there heckling or names called?

E. SOURI: I am sure there was. I, you know, I don't quite remember. I remember going through. But I don't remember coming back out again. So there had to be. I just can't believe that there wasn't.

RUSSELL: And the African-American children would stay in the school, I guess? Or did they just leave and go home?

E. SOURI: No.

M. SOURI: No. It was only the white kids that walked out.

RUSSELL: So, what happened the second day?

E. SOURI: Pretty much the same. It…

RUSSELL: But they didn't walk out, they just…

E. SOURI: They were gathering outside of the school playground.

RUSSELL: Excuse me. Did they go into the school and walk out again?

E. SOURI: No.

M. SOURI: No. They just didn't go in.

E. SOURI: No. They just stayed out. They didn't go in at all. And it was the old building, then. So the old building is where the playground exists now. And the playground at that time was where the new building is. So, it was like reverse order. And there was a driveway through a large gate with access into the playground from Eighth Street. And I remember going through that driveway. It was an incline, and then kids outside on the street on the sidewalk. But I don't recall any serious heckling. If there was, I just closed myself to it.

M. SOURI: Yeah, I think a lot about it. I know I did. I basically wiped a lot of it out. I knew I had to go to school.

E. SOURI: It was a very threatening situation. You didn't really know what to expect. There was a lot of hostility and I felt like… I felt very uncomfortable, in jeopardy.

M. SOURI: Yeah, but nobody did anything very horrible or nobody threw anything. (two speaking together) It was, you know, basically just a lot of noise or jeering, or something like that. And that was it. But inside it was just eerily quiet as it could possibly be.

RUSSELL: And the teachers were trying to keep things normal?

M. SOURI: Yeah.

E. SOURI: Just act as if nothing had happened.

M. SOURI: Just act as if nothing was happening. (laughter)

RUSSELL: They did not talk about what was going on outside?

M. SOURI: No, no.

E. SOURI: If they did, it didn't leave any impression, anything that they might have said?

M. SOURI: Yeah, not at all.

RUSSELL: So, did most of the school fail to come the second day, or did they…?

E. SOURI: I just remember a crowd outside on the sidewalk. So, no I don't think every kid showed up on that particular day. Some probably stayed away. But I do remember a crowd of kids being outside of the school on the second day.

RUSSELL: And they stayed there all day, again?

E. SOURI: They must have. I cannot be sure.

M. SOURI: Cause once we went in the school, we didn't leave it.

E. SOURI: And I don't think even went outside on the playground at that time. I think we stayed inside.

M. SOURI: Just to keep anyone whoever was inside away from… Just in case there would be trouble.

E. SOURI: But I would imagine the police would have been there. If nothing else, to act as escorts for the black children that were going to the school.

RUSSELL: The third day. What happened the third day?

E. SOURI: It was a replay. And it would have been at about that time that some of the white kids would have started going back into the school again.

M. SOURI: It didn't last very long, then, when the kids started going back to school.

RUSSELL: And just on the third day there was a drifting back?

M. SOURI: Yeah, a few.

E. SOURI: A few. And then there were some… really some hard heads that stayed out even longer, way beyond, but ultimately showed up at the school. But that could have been a much as two weeks later.

RUSSELL: Two weeks later, they were still hanging around outside?

E. SOURI: I don't know if they were hanging around. I know that they were not in the classrooms.

M. SOURI: They just didn't come to school. Have a feeling at that point, between the principal and the teachers, they were probably talking to them and their parents. And things like that. But nothing was ever outwardly said or done that I could be aware of. I do remember hearing that, I guess, the first day—well not the first day, but whenever it was known that desegregation was it. There was always a rivalry between Anacostia High School and Eastern. And, I think the one day they showed solidarity. They met, a whole bunch of the kids in the middle of… What bridge is that… Sousa… Sousa bridge or the Eleventh Street bridge, one of them. They all met in the middle and, you know, showed their protest, that they're not going into school. So, I remember hearing about that. I just thought it was funny. It was, you know, crazy. But it's funny, I have been trying to think about what I really remembered about desegregation. I guess we just kept going to school.

RUSSELL: Well, how did things change? You know, in the classroom. Say, by the end of the year?

E. SOURI: Well, things were pretty calm by then. There were not any more upheavals after that time.

M. SOURI: Right. And again you still didn't have that many African-Americans at the school yet. It still hadn't really happened.

RUSSELL: And the ones who were there, did you get… did they stay together still by the end of the year?

E. SOURI: I don't remember that.

M. SOURI: No, I never really made any, I guess, friends with any of them until I went to Eastern. Because everybody was still kind of a staying in their own little clique. They hadn't quite gotten where everybody wanted to, you know, mix yet.

RUSSELL: So, were their school events that you remember? You know, socials or sports?

M. SOURI: Um no, not at Hine. Eastern had stuff. But they didn't really do that much at Hine. If they did, we didn't go or we weren't allowed. (laughter). That's not because of segregation or desegregation; it just that it wasn't something.

E. SOURI: We got an award for good citizenship. Remember that?

M. SOURI: Yeah, yeah.

E. SOURI: There was an assembly one day at Hine. And I remember seeing our parents there. I didn't know why they were there.

M. SOURI: Yeah.

E. SOURI: The Daughters of the American Revolution Award or something like the DAR.

M. SOURI: I still don't know why.

E. SOURI: And ah. We were in the audience, and we were called up to the stage to get our award. You know, nothing could be any more embarrassing (laughter), especially to have your parents there. And in front of the entire school, because we didn't walk out with all the other kids.

RUSSELL: You were singled out for that?

E. SOURI: Yep.

M. SOURI: Yeah.

E. SOURI: To get a special award cause we did not walk out.

RUSSELL: Just the two of you?

E. SOURI: Well, I don't remember anyone else. But I sure remember myself… (speaking together)

M. SOURI: I'm sure there were others. But I just remember us, and were like… My glory! And I remember another time. We didn't tell Mom and Dad. We were getting our letters or something and we didn't tell them. They found out later that we got them.

E. SOURI: I don't remember.

M. SOURI: Or it's either that or I did that for the… What was that other thing you got a pin for?

E. SOURI: I don't know, it was from the Historical Society or something. I didn't tell them. I didn't want them there (laughter by all).

RUSSELL: Do you still have the award?

E. SOURI: No.

M. SOURI: I doubt it.

E. SOURI: I have no idea where it would be. I do not know.

M. SOURI: But yeah, I had forgotten about that.

E. SOURI: Well, I hadn't. And it just shows you, I suppose, how much the teaching staff was supporting integration, to do that. They didn't have to do that. And, especially to make it an entire school affair.

RUSSELL: Was the whole assembly just for that, or were there other awards?

M. SOURI: No.

E. SOURI: Not that I know of.

RUSSELL: Just for you?

E. SOURI: Well, there must have been other kids as well… (all speaking together) I can't say there were just us. It's a little bit too much, but I remember getting the award.

RUSSELL: All those who stayed in school?

E. SOURI: Must have.

M. SOURI: I am sure they did; I am sure they did.

E. SOURI: Up on that stage.

RUSSELL: Did you get any heat from the kids?

E. SOURI: We must have. That's a very good question, and we must have. Like, you know, you are the goody.

M. SOURI: You're a goody two-shoes type thing. It's like, you don't know my parents. (laughter). I mean, not that they would have beat us or anything. They wouldn't, but they expected us to do…

E. SOURI: And, actually, I don't even remember them saying one thing or another, one way or another.

M. SOURI: No.

E. SOURI: It was almost as if this is what we were expected to do.

M. SOURI: It's what you were expected to do. It wasn't that, you know, you have a choice: Do you want to go to school today or you don't? You know it was a school day and you went.

E. SOURI: Now, I don't believe that they were that much in favor of integration, either. I don't want you to get that impression. They weren't, but they knew what we had to do, which was to go to school. And so we did.

RUSSELL: So, did you talk about it at home?

E. SOURI: Not that I recall. I am sure that we did. I mean, after all, they would ask us questions and we would relate the events. But we didn't really sit down and have any in-depth discussion about the affair.

M. SOURI: They never made any big deal about it. It was something that was happening. You know, I remember some of my grandmother's cousins saying, "You know, this is going to be… You've got to move now. You can't stay here. Look what's going to happen. You know, it's like…"

E. SOURI: Anyways, after that, the neighborhood started to breakup. And that probably took a period of whatever—three years, five years. By the time we got Eastern High School, then it was obvious that there was a major change.

M. SOURI: We were in the minority.

E. SOURI: Right. In the makeup of the school. And by the time I graduated, there could have been seven white kids in the entire school.

RUSSELL: In the school? Wow.

E. SOURI: So, we were a little enclave. And we pretty much kept together. Other than a few black friends that we might have made, we were isolated.

RUSSELL: So, by the second year at Hine… Well you were in grade eight?

M. SOURI: Yes

RUSSELL: So did you go to grade nine at Hine?

M. SOURI: Yes

RUSSELL: Yes. And you would have had two more years?

E. SOURI: Yes.

RUSSELL: So what was it like by the time you left? What was the proportion of…?

M. SOURI: Oh, were pretty much in the minority about that time.

RUSSELL: At Hine?

M. SOURI: Yeah, oh yeah.

E. SOURI: I don't remember, I really don't remember what it was. Only that there were more and more black children coming in at the time. And that's because the neighborhoods were changing. People were moving away.

RUSSELL: And there were no further incidents?

E. SOURI: No, not that I know of.

M. SOURI: There was never anything, really, at Eastern, either. Yeah, I know they had their gangs and stuff, but that was typical. We didn't, you know, associate with them. They had their gangs. We didn't do that.

E. SOURI: And I don't really remember having any black friends at Hine.

M. SOURI: No, not at Hine; I had a few at Eastern.

E. SOURI: At Eastern, yes. Not at Hine. And, I think, that's because they were still, you know, because there were white kids there, that I remember making friends with white children. So the black children were sort of in the background. They were there, but not the number that were at Eastern.

RUSSELL: So by the time you left and you graduated from Hine, how may black kids were in your class?

E. SOURI: I couldn't really tell, but I would say a third.

RUSSELL: A third?

E. SOURI: I don't feel like… I know that we were not in the minority at the time. Not at Hine. Obviously, there had been a change.

RUSSELL: What about the teaching staff, was it about the same?

E. SOURI: They were starting to change. It was just a sprinkle of black teachers, none that I can recall. In fact, I doubt that I had any—any black teachers in Hine.

RUSSELL: And was the educational level about the same?

E. SOURI: Yes, I'd say so.

M. SOURI: Yeah, they maintained… yeah, nothing really changed.

E. SOURI: They had before and after (laughter by all). This is all in retrospect now.

RUSSELL: So, when you went to Eastern first.

M. SOURI: Yeah.

RUSSELL: And when you got there…

M. SOURI: There were blacks there. I mean at that point it was, what, two years later.

RUSSELL: And what was the proportion that you would say?

M. SOURI: Oh, I have no idea.

RUSSELL: Just guessing?

M. SOURI: Um.

RUSSELL: Just in your classroom.

M. SOURI: I'm just trying to think. We were about half and half. Because I took mostly academic courses. So, they… I guess the caliber of the student was little bit different in that set, in those classes. Cause those were supposed to be the college courses that would get you ready for college.

RUSSELL: And the kids in the academic classes were equally… black as well as white?

M. SOURI: Yes, yeah.

RUSSELL: In the same proportion as the rest of the school?

M. SOURI: And wasn't our… It was either the principal or the vice-principal, I know he was black. I can't remember.

E. SOURI: At Eastern?

M. SOURI: Yeah, at Eastern.

E. SOURI: Yeah, the principal was white, Colonel somebody. He was a retired colonel. But I have forgotten what his name was. And then a… right, there was black vice principal, who I think took his place as principal once he… Once the colonel retired.

M. SOURI: Yeah, you're right.

E. SOURI: But I don't recall what the man's name was.

M. SOURI: But I remember, I was in the choral group, Eastern's choral. The one that still gets highly rated. We didn't have any problems there, and we went all over the city to sing. And to do things like that: football games, baseball games. We never had any problems.

RUSSELL: Did you think of yourselves as being pioneers?

M. SOURI: No, no. (laughter) Not at all. We just went to school.

E. SOURI: We just happen to be there. (laughter)

RUSSELL: Wasn't this anything new, you know, a kind of experiment?

E. SOURI: Well, it was obvious there was a social change, things were never going to be the same again. And, I think, that was upsetting, since people don't like to see things change, even kids. You are accustomed to one way of having things done or seeing things done. Now there's this new change that's pushed upon us. I had a feeling of resentment about that, because I felt like the old way was gone and I was comfortable with it. Now there is a new way coming in and it's unknown. And how does a child face something like that? I think its difficult for some adults, let alone a kid. So, I remember feeling ill at ease about the blacks coming in, because I didn't know what to expect. They were a different people, so to speak. And I didn't know why, but I knew that they were. And I didn't know what to expect from that particular change. I felt like things just weren't going to be the same. You felt a little bit threatened.

RUSSELL: So, by the time you were going to Eastern High School, did you know what you were going to be facing?

E. SOURI: No, no. I think I went to Eastern naive, not really knowing what I would face. I felt I would face pretty much the same thing as what I saw at Hine. But it was completely different situation.

RUSSELL: From the first day?

E. SOURI: That I don't recall. No, I don't. It wasn't the first day. I think it's a gradual process of realizing that things really are different at this place than they were in the other place. The kids are older and much more sophisticated. And then, of course, there were more blacks. And there was friction. There was just no doubt about it, there was. I know there was.

M. SOURI: Oh yeah, there was friction. I remember in our gym classes, we always had to take showers. That was a prerequisite, and there were a lot of them who refused to take showers because there were these other people there. And, you know, it's like… it's all the same, then eventually you didn't have to.

RUSSELL: You didn't have to take showers?

M. SOURI: No, they stopped them.

RUSSELL: But everything else in the school was integrated, right?

M. SOURI: Oh, yeah.

E. SOURI: Oh, yeah. I remember Eastern having a cadet corps at the time. They've got the cadet corps for decades now. I was in the cadet corps. And the first year of the cadet corps was mostly… entirely white. Gradually, it changed over in the years to come, and I'd become an office in the corps. I don't know just what year it was. But it could have been my sophomore year. At one point, I remember, I got into a fight with a black kid. Something was going on. They were playing dice on the floor and I told them to stop. I was an officer at the time. And they wouldn't. And this one black was bigger than I was, and meaner. And I remember he hit me in the face. And we were on the floor wrestling before the whole thing got broken up. And it was at that point that I realized that nothing will never be the same. Ever.

END OF TAPE 3/SIDE 1

TAPE 3/SIDE 2

E. SOURI: In our senior year, we were down to just so many white kids. And one day walking home—I think it was on a Friday, because it was a game day, a football game day—so it was a cold evening, and it was not quite twilight. But bunch of us were leaving Eastern's football field and encountered a group of blacks. And one of the blacks, or several, started to push around one of the kids in our group. And there wasn't very much you could do about it. Usually, they were bigger than we were, and meaner. And the one kid did get punched around, but he couldn't do anything about it. So, it was not a very smooth process. It was a shame that it wasn't. I think, in a way, the blacks knew that we resented them and took it out on us. Especially since we were in the minority.

RUSSELL: Do you remember discussing with your friends whether or not they were leaving the school? The ones who, you know, the exodus that was occurring? Do you remember discussing it?

E. SOURI: When you say exodus…

RUSSELL: Exodus from the school and the neighborhood. Was that a topic you discussed?

E. SOURI: You mean all together?

RUSSELL: Yeah.

E. SOURI: Oh, yeah. Kids, well, they would say that they were leaving. They wouldn't exactly say why they were leaving. But they were leaving, and you'd find out that they were moving away. They'd say that they were moving away. Or sometimes there would be no discussion at all when the school year started. There'd be white kids that were there the year before that just weren't there anymore. They had moved during the summer. I remember also another white kid who was punched around. Also there was a third incident that I remember at Hine… or at Eastern. And for no particular reason, other than a black kid didn't like him. So it was not a very comfortable atmosphere. It didn't happen a lot, but you knew it could happen. There was some violence, but no one ever did anything about it, as far as I know. I also remember at Hine, one of the teachers got pushed by one of the black kids in the cafeteria. It was a lady teacher. I don't know what she was trying to do. She was trying to discipline the boy, and he pushed her. She fell and struck her head on the edge of the table. And that kid disappeared. He was put out of the school. And that was at Hine, I remember that. And I wish I could remember that lady's name. She was a very bossy individual. I don't know what she was trying to do.

RUSSELL: Was it the same principal that was there throughout your time at Hine?

E. SOURI: At Hine?

RUSSELL: Yeah.

E. SOURI: I don't remember.

M. SOURI: Yeah, she was. I don't remember when she retired. She was there a long time, even after we left.

RUSSELL: You said Draper, Mrs. Draper?

M. SOURI: Yeah, Mrs. Draper. I don't… That's all I remember of her.

RUSSELL: How did they manage with the discipline and order at Eastern?

E. SOURI: I don't recall that there was.

M. SOURI: Yeah. The principal was whatever her, whatever his name was.

E. SOURI: Probably will think of that name eventually.

M. SOURI: I know. He used to walk the halls.

E. SOURI: Yeah, he was a very, very straight-laced individual. You know, he still had military staff written all over him.

M. SOURI: And he used to walk the halls, and you were a little bit more careful.

RUSSELL: You weren't concerned about violence in the halls?

M. SOURI: No, no.

E. SOURI: No, not that I remember.

RUSSELL: Or in the bathrooms, or…?

M. SOURI: No.

E. SOURI: No. There was smoking in the bathrooms.

M. SOURI: No, I was going to say that everybody smoked. They would turn on the hot water to steam it up so they could smoke. You would go in there and you would cough your lungs out. (laughter)

E. SOURI: No, I remember though, fewer and fewer white children. Eastern had, at that time, what was known as a stage crew. And it was made up of boys who worked on the stage. I don't even remember what we did anymore during the free hour. And there was a gentleman who was the manager of the stage. And we somehow, the white kids—the white boys, I don't know about the girls—gravitated into the stage crew. There were just a very few of us. And we would stay on the stage. You have to understand at that time the stage had a heavy asbestos curtain. It wasn't really curtain, it was a wall. And it could raise and lower, but the thing was enormous; it was huge. And it was a fire wall obviously, made of asbestos, and we could raise or lower that wall. Once you lowered that wall you were isolated from the rest of the school, except for the side doors to the stage, and we would stay in there. And sort of like our refuge, and…

RUSSELL: This was what, at the end of…?

E. SOURI: This must have been the last two years of my being at Eastern. I had quit the cadets. I did that because I was running into too much trouble with the black kids. There was just no way that I felt I could work with them. They really didn't want to be in the cadet corps, and so it was turning into a farce. And so I finally gave up. And I think I gave up on my… somewhere during my junior year. I just gave up, I just couldn't deal with it anymore. And ultimately ended up with the kids on the stage crew. And we would just hang out back there, behind the stage, because there was no other place for us to go.

RUSSELL: This is at lunch time or…?

E. SOURI: Or any free time that we had in school.

RUSSELL: Or any free time.

E. SOURI: Sometimes we would even cut some of the classes. I remember cutting out on a physics class just to spend time with the boys behind the stage, behind the asbestos curtain.

RUSSELL: Did you do any… Did you work as a stage hand otherwise?

E. SOURI: Yes. Oh yeah, we did that too. And the boys who were on the stage crew also changed the light bulbs in the corridors. And that was their job; it was a volunteer thing. But it was a way for us to stay together in that particular atmosphere.

RUSSELL: So was there a cafeteria there that you would go to?

E. SOURI: No. I took my own lunch. (laughter). I probably did. In fact, I suspect that I went there, say, for a carton of milk, something like that. But, other than that, I took my own lunch. And I remember eating lunch either on the stage or up in the movies projection booth.

M. SOURI: The tower, we used to go to the tower. Do you ever go into the tower?

E. SOURI: I remember going up into the attic.

M. SOURI: We were not supposed to go there.

E. SOURI: Where the pigeons were?

M. SOURI: Yeah.

E. SOURI: Yeah, I remember that. There was a walkway. It was up above the ceiling of the stage. That was like, whatever, four stories up, or something—three stories up. And you didn't want to step off the walkway, because your foot could go through the ceiling. And so you just had to be careful not to do that. But these were the things that we got into because we weren't really mixing with the general population of the school, which was all black.

RUSSELL: So, by the time of your graduating class… how many of you were going to college from that grade?

E. SOURI: Probably two of us; very few. You mean of the entire graduating class.

RUSSELL: Yes.

E. SOURI: Oh, I can't give you a fair answer. I thought you meant among the white kids. I don't know. I don't know. There some who did. There was one black boy that I know, his name was Jerome Wood. And we worked together on the school newspaper. And he was very good. And he was not like the other black children. He didn't fit. And I remember that. That's probably the reason why we became friends, or I befriended him. He was culturally different from the other black kids.

M. SOURI: Yeah. That's what I… In my class with some of the girls. They were definitely culturally different. Some had parents who had been in the military. And they, I guess would say, were better educated or more rounded in being around people. And we did… a lot of us did… like I was art editor on the yearbook. We worked on the newspaper. You know we were in these little organizations that do things after school or during school.

RUSSELL: And the group was interracial?

M. SOURI: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

RUSSELL: And the yearbook was?

M. SOURI: Oh yeah, yeah.

E. SOURI: In fact don't we have the yearbooks upstairs?

M. SOURI: I don't think so.

E. SOURI: I think I have one upstairs.

M. SOURI: Maybe.

E. SOURI: There are two, I think, from Eastern.

RUSSELL: That would be interesting to…

E. SOURI: I have my Eastern letter for golf.

RUSSELL: You played golf?

E. SOURI: I played golf.

RUSSELL: And how many of you played golf at Eastern?

E. SOURI: We are… played golf. There used to be a golf course on Anacostia flats. It's not there anymore. And there is also one of course at Haines Point. And ah… but we would do tournaments out on Anacostia flats.

RUSSELL: How many of you played golf at Eastern?

E. SOURI: White kids or…

RUSSELL: Any kids?

E. SOURI: Oh, I don't know how many were on the golf team. There were less than a dozen.

RUSSELL: Any black kids?

E. SOURI: Yes. There were some black kids playing golf. Yes indeed.

RUSSELL: So, you were very busy at school. You seem to have been.

E. SOURI: Yeah. It a… right, I think so. With the cadet corps, the stage crew, and playing golf.

M. SOURI: Yeah, I belonged to the Spanish Club, the newspaper, and yearbook. And what else? There was something else I belonged to. But yeah, we didn't… nothing stopped all of these… and I belonged to the choral group, the chorus. We had that as part of a music class. We had to be there for rehearsals in the morning before school. Like an hour before school actually started. So yeah, nothing stopped. We had all of these little groups, and they were integrated. Everybody did things, if you wanted to. It was not something you had to. And I don't even remember if we got extra credit or anything else. Probably not, we just did it because we wanted to. And we would put on… we did plays and different things like that. I don't know how I even had nerve to get up on the stage to be honest with you. But I did it.

RUSSELL: So, to a point did it seem like a normal high school experience?

E. SOURI: I think so.

M. SOURI: Yeah, it did, really.

RUSSELL: You didn't think of yourselves as exceptional?

M. SOURI: No, uh-uh.

RUSSELL: Did you ever go to a reunion?

M. SOURI: Oh, no. I don't buy those things.

E. SOURI: No.

M. SOURI: No. They keep trying. I get some calls every September. Invitations. Oh, you've got to come, they want to see what you look like. I thought, who could care; they don't want to see what I look like. No, I wasn't interested enough because we really didn't pal around with anybody that much. We had a few, I would say, friends, but didn't really do anything together. We were more friends at school but when we came… When we walked through that front door and came here in this house, it was a different world.

RUSSELL: So, who did you pal around with?

M. SOURI: Our cousins (laughter).

E. SOURI: But the group at Eastern was the ones that we palled around with. There were… It was mixed: there was one Chinese girl, I remember, one Philippine guy. His name was Bernie.

M. SOURI: I remember Fan, he was the Chinese. He was in my group. It was a mixture.

E. SOURI: I was also among them until the time you left. But what I'm trying to get at was… all of us, even the different races, stayed together. And I don't remember seeing them mixing that much with the blacks, which was kind of an odd situation.

RUSSELL: Were these Chinese kids at Hine?

E. SOURI: Not, that I remember.

M. SOURI: No, but they were at Eastern.

RUSSELL: But, you don't remember where those kids went to school before Eastern?

M. SOURI: I don't know.

E. SOURI: Cause they came from other junior high schools around. So, I don't know where they were beforehand. But I just remember at that time it seemed incongruous that they would stick together with the white kids and not mix with the blacks. There was an English teacher, Miss Prince.

M. SOURI: Oh, yeah.

E. SOURI: With her sheltie, Nichodemas. She so loved that dog; she had him on a pedestal.

M. SOURI: (Laughter)

E. SOURI: But one day in English class, and it was a mixed class at that time, and I don't know how it all came about, but she was explaining the word "niggardly" to the class. She was very prim, she was a very prim, steel-rod-backbone type individual. And she very, very easily, eloquently explained the meaning of the word, that there was nothing derogatory about it at all. And, of course, the class accepted it. There was not a word said, and I thought she did a good job. And I remember her for that. It could have been an extremely awkward situation.

M. SOURI: She was very good at bridging with people, and she could say just about anything. But she knew how to say it and explain. And nobody ever got upset about it—nobody. And I don't remember anybody having any problems. You know, other than some, your outside kids. You always had what you called your toughs. You know the ones who always thought they could rule everybody and tell you what to do. But within the classes, I don't remember any real problems.

RUSSELL: So the teachers were more… without much exception, white.

M. SOURI: Oh, yeah. That hadn't changed, that hadn't really changed.

RUSSELL: You had a vice principal who was not white?

M. SOURI: Right, he was black.

RUSSELL: And he was the only one?

M. SOURI: I'm trying to remember. I know we had some black teachers. You know, I remember one and I can't think of his name. He was good, and we were all friends friendly. Just… you could sit and talk to him.

E. SOURI: Our physics teacher was black. I remember that.

M. SOURI: I remember some of our older teachers that were having a hard time dealing with some of the black kids. They weren't sure how to talk to them. And, I think, they were always afraid they were going to offend. And they didn't want to do that.

E. SOURI: But even they disappeared. They either retired or moved away.

M. SOURI: Yeah, cause they were probably past retirement age… they were really old.

E. SOURI: It just that… my impression is that by the time I graduated then the teaching staff had changed. It was almost entirely black, and all the old ones that were there when I first started were gone.

M. SOURI: They had retired.

E. SOURI: So things had changed. And changed dramatically. That, by then, would have been around 1958.

RUSSELL: 58?

M. SOURI: I remember we used to… at homeroom we started every morning, we started out with a prayer.

E. SOURI: Here?

M. SOURI: At Eastern.

E. SOURI: Oh, at school. Yeah.

M. SOURI: Not here. But at Eastern we always did. We had very southern lady, she was… I can't remember her name, but she… she couldn't say my name worth a darn. Its just like OK, I give up. But she'd been teaching long enough, she knew that kids were kids. That's all it was; kids were kids, it didn't make any difference. You knew who or what you were.

RUSSELL: So, have you seen any of the people involved in the Hine walkout, since?

M. SOURI: No.

E. SOURI: No.

RUSSELL: Do you know where any of them are now?

E. SOURI: No.

RUSSELL: It would be interesting to talk to, to interview, some of them who walked out.

M. SOURI: I think most of them have left the area, to be honest with you.

E. SOURI: Who knows?

M. SOURI: I know there are still a few from Eastern around. I was in contact with a few of the girls for a while, then I never heard from them again.

E. SOURI: One that didn't walk out that I remember was a kid called Charlie Free. And two that I remember walked out, one was called Joe Smith and the other one was Holly Warwick.

M. SOURI: Glory.

E. SOURI: And a kid who was a good friend of mine who walked out—and I did not expect him to—his name was Steve Hagimosie, but it was not Japanese. I don't know what it was. And he walked out and I didn't expect him to. But ultimately, the kid, Charlie Free, his family was to move. And Steve's family moved. They were good friends of mine. So I just felt, you know, sort of left behind when that happened. The other two, Joe Smith and Holly Warwick, they were just… they were dummies. I never liked them. They were troublemakers, and it would be interesting to see them now. Just to see what has happened to them and their lives at this particular age, after all these years. It would interesting.

M. SOURI: Actually, my cousin went to a reunion. She met some of them. She went when?… this past summer.

E. SOURI: Just recently.

M. SOURI: Yeah.

RUSSELL: To a Hine reunion?

E. SOURI: It was an Eastern.

M. SOURI: Eastern.

M. SOURI: She met one of the kids that lived not—where Liz and Michael live—but where the Mrs. Kamicki lives [1119 East Capitol]. She said you wouldn't recognize myself or him anyway.

E. SOURI: They wouldn't even recognize me, for heaven's sakes.

M. SOURI: We didn't play with them; he was older. But I think he put up with us.

RUSSELL: Can you think of other people we should interview?

M. SOURI: Most of them, I don't even know where they are. I just don't know where they live anymore.

RUSSELL: Anybody who went through school with you or went through some of the…?

M. SOURI: Most of them have left the area.

E. SOURI: I am trying to think if there is anybody that I would know of anymore.

M. SOURI: I know a few moved out towards like Clinton, Waldorf, things like that. But the ones that I palled around with… I know one went to California, another went… where did she go? It was up Wisconsin somewhere. I mean everybody just scattered after graduation, between college and getting married. They just basically scattered, and we kept maybe… probably kept in touch for a couple of years and that was it. So we are probably the only ones that stayed in the same place.

E. SOURI: There was one other kid I remember from Hine too, that I believe that walked out. I think his name was Donald Weisfeld. I have the impression that he is—or his family is—still maybe in the Washington area, but I don't know where. I think I remember seeing that name in the newspaper, as an attorney. It could be just a coincidence. And that's from Hine. But I don't even know if he would be around anymore.

RUSSELL: Well, do you think we should stop, do you think you have done enough?

E. SOURI: I think so.

M. SOURI: Yeah.

E. SOURI: I'm pretty much reminisced out.

END OF INTERVIEW